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**POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF BAL GANGADHAR TILAK:  
CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE & CHALLENGES**

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**Dr. Badruddin**

Professor (Political Science), PES's RSN College of Arts & Science, Ponda, Goa

**Corresponding Author- Dr. Badruddin**

Email: [drbadar786@gmail.com](mailto:drbadar786@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:**

*Tilak, often called as the Father of Indian Nationalism, set an example of true Swaraj and spiritual nationalism. Tilak's contributions in education, social development, and political philosophy, remain unique example in contemporary India. As a controversial revolutionary and radical reformer, Tilak deserves due place in modern India despite odds and challenges.*

**Keywords:** Swaraj, Nation Building, Revolution, Hinduism

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**Background**

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, one of the rare thinkers in Modern India, has been associated with Swaraj and Nationalism. Popularly known as 'Lokmanya' (man in world), has been man of letters, inherently genius, unimaginative thinker and possessed many facets of life. As an integrative, enlightened, and visionary profile; Tilak was the true lover of Swaraj who was born in traditional Chitpawan Brahmin family at Ratnagiri, Maharashtra. Inspired by great personalities like Baji Rao, Nanda Fadnavis and Gokhale who mould the educational thinking of Tilak. For reasons, Tilak became the Hercules of Spiritual Nationalism, journalist spirit, and educationist; discarded colonialism, and embraced the Heroism of Shivaji. Even Tilak was motivated by Hegel (Law of Dialectics), Kant (Spiritual Truth), Spencer (Social Evolution), Mill (Individual Liberty), Voltaire (Constitutional Government), and Rousseau (Popular Sovereignty) who molded the educational thinking. Tilak also made comparative study of Rig-Veda, Vedanta, Mahabharata, Gita and Ramayana as the epics of Hinduism. Tilak acquired unimaginative talent, expertise and fantastic power of common men which help to reform, regenerate, and innovate India's freedom. Had there not been the birth of Tilak, India's freedom would have been either in jeopardy or pushed delayed for several years as argued by many contemporary scholars. Tilak as a divine force of India's Educational Philosophy, scholar of Mathematics, Marathi culture and Sanskrit; was graduated in law from Poona University and reputed judge of Bombay High Court.

**Contributions of Tilak:** Tilak was born talented who has unimaginative power to develop India's political philosophy and it is rather difficult to put the voluminous writings. Let us have brief outlook of Tilak about education, social reforms and philosophical works.

**Tilak on Education**

Tilak considered education as the mainstream of society that significantly helped in social consciousness and awakening of masses. True education supports and directs the right path of nationalism and patriotism in achieving Swaraj. Education also helps in promoting courage, commitment, dedication and proper understanding. Tilak was a great visionary to promote education and academic platforms only for the betterment of Indians which was designed to promote the community building which was evidently seen from the establishment of large number of academic bodies in Marathwada Region. Education in any way is the proud of culture, generation and helpful in building good character. Incorporation of religious and spiritual bases of education have been the tradition of India since generations. For varied reasons, Tilak disapproved education which was not linked to spiritual faith and disliked English System of Education in India that miserably lacked *Sanskars* (Indian way of rituals). However, Tilak supported the establishment of new system of education while incorporating Indian and western models. Such ideas mooted by Tilak earned wide popularity in forms of several schools and colleges in India. Tilak was an instrumental and motivating force to inculcate the western democratic views and India

nationalism. In order to promote education as the backbone of nation building, Tilak took constructive steps in establishing English School, Ferguson College and Deccan Education Society (DEC) at Poona. These institutions are now the proud education in India with star status. In fact, Tilak's intention was to promote young generation through educational platform and helped to take active part in Swaraj. In order to promote education, Tilak suggested four types of education in India: secular education, religious education, industrial education and political education. Thus, Tilak set an example of establishing education based on multidimensional character. Unfortunately, these educational principles of Tilak did not impress the gross root Indian due to division in ideology, regional variations, communal disharmony, social stigma, linguistic chauvinism and political conditions. But Tilak's educational ideas are duly accepted by several sections of intelligentsia community. Tilak had sound knowledge of Hindi, Sanskrit, English and Marathi, apart from Vedas, Vedantas, Puranas, Mahabharat and Gita. In fact, Vedic Scripts helped significantly to develop frontiers of knowledge. For Tilak, real freedom is Knowledge is based Swaraj for better administration, education and social journalism. Tilak was a scholar of deep learning and culture, and neither politics nor prison prevented Tilak from enriching Marathi literature. Tilak realized that a little modification in the existing education system would not prove fruitful and pleaded for an overall change and so he said that "Pray, Please, Protest", would not bring any concrete result. He, therefore, raised the slogan for *Swadeshi*. Tilak was a realistic educationist who wanted that education should serve as a medium for bringing about the harmonious development of individuals and society and prepare the youth for future of India.

#### **Social Reforms**

Tilak was highly versatile and intellectual who beautifully created the application of revivalism and revolution strongly supported Indians to change minds through social reformation and purification. Various social reforms like emancipation and education for women, social justice to all, communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims; supported re-marriage under entrain social conditions and opposed untouchability. Tilak also opposed blind faith of western minds, actions and practices, and created new platforms by means of non-violence, peace, simplicity and love for humanity. Tilak's conception about

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inner purity, open heart and creative minds became the imperatives of life. In one of the public speeches, Tilak said: 'All the reforms grow from within and unless people are sufficiently prepared by the assimilation of liberal ideas, it is useless to march ahead'. Tilak accepted organic evolution, spontaneous conception of social transformation and opposed any kind of non-progressive elements. Tilak even confidently criticized some of his contemporaries like Ranade, Gokhale, Bhandarkar and Malbari for their misguided propagation and alignment of violent westernism, materialistic notions, and personal interest. No social value will prosper unless people come on one platform. A greater need was felt for co-religious, co-social and co-cultural mediations to defeat western media, mind and action and these are true imperatives of contemporary India to bring Indians on one platform.

**Political Reforms:** Political Reforms of Tilak is the most comprehensive part of Sawarj, nation building and revolution which can be briefly highlighted under the following heads.

#### **Tilak on British Rule in India**

No India political thinker was so bold and confident like Tilak who out rightly rejected British Rule in India as it was unrealistic, unacceptable and non-compensative. India famous for past glories and culture, needed to be revived and re generated by alienation of English Rule, methods of imperialism and misuse of colonial power. Tilak was hard critique of moderates for being lenient and friendly with British India. Any kind of support, services, favouratism, leniency, influence and bargaining with English Rule was not acceptable by Tilak. For such attitudes, Tilak is often called as the first 'Revolutionary of India'.

#### **Tilak's Conception of Boycott**

Boycott literally refers to refuse, rejects and terminates any social, economic and political activity. In fact, Tilak's very notion of Swaraj is based on boycott only which comes from *Swadeshi* Movement. It was advocated and popularized by Tilak which was designed to reject all sorts of foreign goods and commercial services from British India. However, Tilak openly rejected any commercial activity with political benefits or otherwise, the very basic objectives of boycott will not be served. For variety of reasons, Tilak took radical steps to boycott English Rule which was based on autocratic, dictatorial and authoritarian regimes, and suggested for vigorous steps in the direction of India's freedom. In short, the formulation of

boycott supported dissociation of British Goods, economic pressure on English Businessmen, save India from British tyranny, tighten Indian administration in favour of Indian leaders, promotion of non-cooperation movement, provision of constitution base to India, encourage Indian Businessmen for self sufficiency and decentralization of Indian economy. In order to provide boycott as a strong base, Tilak opted revolutionary approach. In one of the public speeches, Tilak said: “You must realize that you are a great factor in the power which the administration of India is conducting...”. In fact, Tilak supported Common Men who are the real spirit and power of Swaraj and therefore suggested every Indian to participate wholeheartedly in India’s freedom movement. In this way, Tilak became the first freedom fighter in true sense, and the movements of Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Swadeshi, Non-Cooperation and Quit India Movement are the gifts of Tilak and not Gandhi.

#### **Tilak on Revolution**

Revolution literally refers to change, recognition, transformation and upheaval. Tilak’s conception of revolution was based on extremist movement as he got the support of Agarkar, Chiplunkar, and Gokhale with view to change the political trends of British India. Tilak gave examples of revolutions: Bengal, Russia, France England and America which were fundamentally designed to promote freedom from tyranny and yoke. Tilak also gave examples for killing in history (Afzal Khan), and Gita (message of Krishna to Arjun). In short, Tilak’s conception of revolution was based on legal violence, peaceful revenge, political agitation, rebellious action, justified political murder and bureaucratic methods. Thus, Tilak’s approach on revolution was different Mao, Stalin, Salazar, Hitler and Mussolini who were famous for barbarism, hero worship, war worship and demagogic character. No doubt Tilak considered Indian land and soil as the main factors of revolution.

#### **Tilak on Swaraj**

Swaraj means: freedom, liberation, independence, peoples wish, political autonomy, and emancipation. Probably, Tilak was the first Indian thinker who has given the most original definition, often called as the ‘Father of Swaraj’ for presenting the most scientific and comprehensive definition. Tilak earns credit for being the intellectual, critically provided philosophical base with strong social, political, and emotional support. For Tilak, Swaraj is a way of life, a mission, an objective, a universal

principle, a logical abstraction, glory, pride and self independence. It was a positive action, meaningful dialogue, and a mission to see Indians as prospective. Tilak accepted Shivaji as his Guru and the real founder of Swaraj. Tilak accepted Swaraj as a base of *Swadharma*, peoples’ government, and action against the despotic rulers (British India). Tilak’s emphasis on Swaraj was framed in accordance with personal, social, and spiritual base. For Tilak, Swaraj is a full fledged reform with no piecemeal and the birth right which must be acquired at any cost for moral necessity and victory of nationalism.

Historically, Tilak’s Swaraj earned support from Annie Besant through Home Rule League (1916). It was a repressive measure which can be attained by adopting federal measures (as in case of USA), based on cooperative and harmonious doctrine without harming the personal and social benefit of imperial power. Thus, Tilak’s Swaraj was identical to Gandhi based on non-violence and peace with no negative intention. It was neither the product of romantic nationalism nor emotional rather it was something great based on duty, perfection, obligation, and rationalism. But Tilak agreed that foreign rule in India in anyway was not favourable to Swaraj, rather it hampered the growth of spiritual entity, and peoples wish. In short, Tilak’s Swaraj stood for Indian-British Coordination, imperial understanding, liberal progressive ends, decentralization of power for *Praja Hita* (peoples’ welfare), judicious rule and social democracy. It was an essential platform for legal, constitutional, and moral protection. No doubt, Tilak’s Swaraj was a boon in disguise for Indians which signified the responsibility of executive to elect representatives of people an embodiment of love. Despite being the most original thinker of Swaraj, Tilak’s ideas suffers from many deficiencies. On numerous grounds, Tilak’s Swaraj does not give clear-cut idea as he wanted to popularize for political benefits only. Tilak’s Swaraj offers only spiritual meaning which did not proved an effective weapon in India’s freedom. Issues related to self government, nature of democratic policy, national building, spiritual emotions, and regional identity do not carry any weighting. Tilak’s Swaraj was merely confined to Maratha region which became more controversial over a period of time. Question related to particular religion (Hinduism), regionalism and methods of struggle virtually failed to impress the Indians thereby divided Indian minds, psyche and attitude.

### Tilak on Nationalism

Nationalism referees to sense of belonging, love and respect for nation. Some scholars have associated nationalism with patriotism. Tilak's views on nationalism is based on three sources: India, western and contemporary which are the broad notion of development. As highly practical and advocate graduated from Bombay University, Tilak was more enthusiastic to develop the spiritual truths of Bhagwat Gita (righteous violence), Mahabharata (non absolutism), Ramayana, Vedas (moral perfection), and even Sanskrit literature and thus tried to put these in one garland to make the symbol of spiritual reality for which the contemporary India is hungry since decades. Such nationalist ideas were incorporated through the noble principles of Maratha saints like Tukaram, Eknath, Ramdas and Namdev. Even spiritual deeds were incorporated from Lord Krishna, Rama, Arjuna, Yudhisthir, Valmiki, and Tulshidas. Tilak accepted the noble ideas of Aristotle, Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel and Green who were the nationalists in their respective ways. Even Tilak accepted the doctrines of John Locke (Individual liberty), J.S. Mill (utilitarian thought), and Woodrow Wilson (14-Points). Tilak's conception of nationalism was based on healthy tradition of ancient Hindu culture who argued that reforms should be based on utter respect and Hindu culture. Tilak through Home Rule movements forwarded, and convinced people to developed Swaraj from their hearts and souls based on spiritual, moral and ethical foundations with due support of patriotism and dedicated efforts. Nationalism needs the spirit of social power, religious foundation, rational thinking, genuine political will. No doubt, Tilak's ideas on nationalism are identical when compared to Gandhi, Vivekanada, Gokhale, Aurobindo, Bankim Chand, and Bipin Chandra although their ideas were more political, whereas Tilak's conception of nationalism was based on vision, understanding, and true symbols that truly created true Indian culture, religion and civilization. Though Tilak was a great nationalist, some of his ideas were full of controversies due regional colorings. Tilak supported Ganapati Festivals as religious means to nationalism but failed to incorporate Indian masses in general. India is country of various religions, festivals and rituals which do not simply supports Maratha culture.

### Tilak: A Contemporary Debate

Truly speaking, Tilak was the first leader of India's independence movement and

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often called as the father of unrest by the British India. Tilak is symbolized as the Maker of Modern India, a close alliance of INC, virtual administrator of Bombay Presidency, most widely known next to Gandhi and truly a radical nationalist and widely acclaimed journalist known for *Kesari* and *Maratha*. Known as contemporary of Lal Bal Pal Triumvirate played crucial in India's freedom struggle. However, some activities of Tilak were hated by British Raj as Tilak underwent imprisonment several times through sedition charges (1897,1909, 1916) which were based on racial animosity. Several contemporaries of Tilak like Jinnah, and Khudiram Bose, Aurobindo Ghose, V. O. Chidambaram Pillai also had to face serious consequences while serving with INC. Probably, the said group of revolutionaries helped Tilak to promote his journalist approach. Tilak's controversial works *Kesari*, *Mahratta* and *Gita Rahasya* were the major source of information and became instrumental in promoting Swaraj which strongly propagated against the English Judicial System. Some critiques believed the implementation of Minto-Morley Reforms (1909) was the source of inspiration to intensify Swaraj and it was purely based on constitutional methods rather than political. Historically, Tilak's Swaraj based on Gandhian Mission (Non-Violence) became reality through All India Home Rule League (1916-18) promoted by Tilak and duly acknowledged by several scholars. Even major milestones liker first world war (1914-1918), October Revolution in Russia (1917), and League of Nations (1918-1921), often memorize Tilak's concept of Swaraj. Unfortunately, several controversies about Tilak like methods, anti-British approach, Hindu *Dharmaśāstras*, Sarvajanic Ganeshotsav, Shiv Jayanti, anti-Muslim stand, concept of karma-yoga, Bhagwat Geeta as base on activism, karma, dharma, and yoga subject of debate. Even the birth of Hindu Nationalist party Shiv Sena is the logical extension of Tilak Mission of *Ganesh Utsava* only. Even Tilak's idols, books, stories, religious sects, festivals, and memoirs, remain protected in his honour. Tilak's multidimensional personalities: extremist, revolutionary and then moderate to non-violence and patriotism remain crucial to understand the teachings and philosophy of Tilak in Modern India continue to face serious challenges related to cultural nationalism, manipulation of historical literature, questioning the existence of historical monuments and communal disharmony.

**Findings**

A perusal of Tilak's views on various ideas show that he was an embodiment of intellectual idealism and political realism, and had strong faith in the vitality of India's profound spiritual heritage and future potentialities. Tilak deserves credit for involving the masses at national struggle and hence became the first pathfinder of India's independence. Even Gandhi called Tilak's patriotism as passion, democratic, Gospel of Swaraj, Messiah of nation building, and even the true freedom fighter of India. Many critiques believe that Tilak was an exponent of Swami Vivekananda and saint Shankaracharya and duly accepted Hindu Philosophy of living and enjoying social life. Virtue of Tilak's learning, eloquence, enthusiasm and sincerity deserve due credit.

**Conclusion**

Tilak remains an unparalleled with immense erudition in the Swaraj. A knowledgeable of many epics, Tilak's perspicacity, vigor, witty, charming personality, gifted with genius, are important parameters. With spiritual will power and agitation mind, was widely recognized, respected and enjoyed the confidence of Swaraj and Nation Building. No doubt Tilak was a supporter of social rituals among Hindus whose ideas were not to hurt any community but to improve and purify the character which are increasingly important while considering ongoing developments in India. Now the time has come to review the nature and working of Indian way of Neo-Swaraj within the broader parameters of Tilak's social and educational reforms. It is high time to initiate Tilak's debates to find out the causes to promote social integrity, national harmony and spiritual love.

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