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Bal Gangadhar Tilak's Four-Fold Programme: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract:

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was one of the prominent leaders who played a significant role in the growth of Indian nationalism and the freedom movement. His Four-Fold Programme emphasized Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott, and National Education as important instruments of political and social mobilisation. This study examines the historical background, objectives, and significance of Tilak's programme in challenging colonial rule. It also analyses his efforts to promote political awareness, indigenous industries, national education, and mass participation. The study highlights the contribution of the Four-Fold Programme to the development of nationalist consciousness in India.

Keywords: Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Four-Fold Programme, Swaraj, Swadeshi, Indian Nationalism.

Introduction

"The boycott is a substitute for war. As we cannot go to war as did the Boers in South Africa, the next best thing is to refuse to buy British goods. That is the spirit behind the Swadeshi and Boycott movement." - **Lokmanya Tilak**

"Swaraj is my birthright, and I will have it." - **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, popularly known as Lokmanya Tilak, was born into a middle-class family on 23 July 1856, a year before the Revolt of 1857. He emerged as one of the most prominent

leaders of Indian nationalism and played a significant role in transforming the freedom movement into a broader popular struggle. The period between 1905 and 1908 marked an important phase in the political career of Tilak. During these years, he rose from being a prominent leader of Maharashtra to becoming a national figure in the Indian freedom movement.

Tilak's political activities and nationalist ideas inspired people across different regions of India. Whether he was in prison or outside it, his personality and

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ideas continued to influence the growth of Indian nationalism. His political objective was ultimately directed towards the attainment of Swarajya or self-rule. His programme of political action emphasized the active participation of the people rather than dependence on constitutional petitions and appeals to the colonial government.

Partition of Bengal and the Rise of Nationalism

The period of intense political activity beginning in 1905 had its immediate background in Lord Curzon's decision to partition Bengal. The partition was announced on 20 July 1905 and generated widespread opposition among Indian nationalists. The leaders of Bengal observed 16 October 1905 as a day of mourning. A large public meeting held at Calcutta Town Hall declared that the boycott of British goods would be an effective means of protesting against the proposed partition.

Tilak viewed the partition of Bengal as an opportunity to unite the Indian people and transform the regional agitation into a nationwide movement. He believed that the movement should reach different sections of society and extend to villages and towns across India. In this context, he advocated a four-fold programme consisting of Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, and Swarajya.

Tilak's Concept of Swarajya

Swarajya occupied a central position in Tilak's political thought. He raised the fundamental question of what Swaraj

actually meant. According to Tilak, Swaraj was not merely rule by native people. He understood it as a form of government based on the wishes and participation of the people.

Tilak interpreted the term Swa as meaning "self" and connected it with the idea of people's rule. Thus, Swaraj, in his understanding, represented self-government and ultimately democratic rule. He believed that the political awakening of the people would eventually lead them towards the achievement of genuine Swaraj.

His demand for Swaraj represented a shift from limited administrative reforms towards a broader political objective. Tilak argued that merely requesting the colonial government to modify particular policies or reduce specific taxes would not be sufficient. He called upon the people to demand self-government as the fundamental political objective.

National Education

National Education was another important component of Tilak's four-fold programme. Before Tilak's entry into public life, many educational institutions in India were operated by the colonial government, while some were managed by Christian missionaries. Tilak and his associates believed that colonial education could encourage excessive imitation of Western culture and create a sense of inferiority among Indians regarding their own traditions, languages, customs, and culture.

Tilak therefore emphasized an education that would cultivate self-respect, hard work, sincerity, patriotism, and a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the nation. In 1880, he collaborated with Vishnushastri Chiplunkar in establishing the New English School. He was later associated with Fergusson College, where he worked as a teacher for some years.

Tilak and his associates also used the press as an important means of spreading political and social awareness. They launched two newspapers: Kesari in Marathi and The Mahratta in English. These publications became important instruments for communicating nationalist ideas to the public.

Swadeshi and Economic Self-Reliance

Swadeshi formed an important part of Tilak's economic and political programme. He strongly criticized the economic exploitation of India under British rule. His writings addressed issues such as the land revenue system, government expenditure, famines, and foreign exchange.

Tilak believed that Indians needed to depend on their own resources and promote indigenous industries. He therefore advocated the use of goods manufactured in India, even when doing so involved personal sacrifice. Swadeshi was intended not only to encourage indigenous production but also to strengthen economic self-reliance among Indians.

The economic policies of the colonial government contributed to Tilak's criticism of British rule. The Indian National Congress had demanded protection for Indian industries from foreign competition through tariff policies. However, the colonial government's policies often favoured British manufacturers. Such developments strengthened the argument for promoting indigenous industries and encouraging the consumption of Indian-made goods.

Boycott as a Political Weapon

Boycott was closely associated with the Swadeshi movement. Tilak viewed the boycott of British goods as an important political instrument through which Indians could express their opposition to colonial policies. During the agitation against the partition of Bengal, the boycott movement gained prominence as a means of putting political pressure on the colonial government.

Tilak's writings in Kesari played an important role in spreading the message of boycott and Swadeshi. His article "The Crisis Arrives," published in August 1905, called upon the people to oppose the partition of Bengal. It was followed by other writings that supported the boycott of British goods and encouraged the establishment of national schools and the use of indigenous products.

These articles were reproduced in newspapers in several parts of India and contributed to the spread of nationalist ideas beyond Maharashtra.

Tilak and the Anti-Partition Movement

Tilak interpreted the partition of Bengal as more than an administrative measure. He argued that the division threatened the unity and solidarity that had developed among the people of Bengal. He therefore called upon people outside Bengal to regard the grievances of their Bengali compatriots as their own.

Tilak's position contributed to the transformation of the anti-partition movement into a broader nationalist campaign. Leaders such as Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghose supported the nationalist programme associated with Tilak and the wider Swadeshi and Boycott movement.

The agitation against the partition of Bengal extended beyond the province itself. Under the influence of the nationalist movement, people in different parts of India expressed solidarity with Bengal and opposition to the colonial government's policy. Tilak recognized the significance of this growing national consciousness and sought to strengthen it through the movements of Swadeshi and Boycott.

Tilak's Political Approach

Tilak advocated a more assertive form of political action than the earlier methods of submitting petitions and requesting administrative reforms. He argued that Indians should move beyond demands for individual reforms and focus on the larger objective of self-government.

His political approach emphasized public participation, national unity, economic self-reliance, and political awareness. Through his newspapers, public activities, and political campaigns, Tilak attempted to mobilize people and transform nationalism from an elite political activity into a wider public movement.

During 1907 and 1908, Tilak devoted considerable attention to the cause of national emancipation. His political activities during this period strengthened his position as one of the leading figures of the nationalist movement.

Historical Significance of the Four-Fold Programme

Tilak's Four-Fold Programme represented an integrated approach to India's struggle against colonial rule. Swadeshi emphasized economic self-reliance, Boycott provided a means of political protest, National Education sought to develop patriotic consciousness, and Swarajya provided the ultimate political objective.

The programme attempted to connect political freedom with economic independence, national education, and public participation. It also encouraged Indians to recognize their collective strength and participate actively in the nationalist movement.

Conclusion

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was one of the prominent figures of the Indian national movement. His Four-Fold Programme of

Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, and Swarajya provided an important framework for political mobilisation during the early twentieth century. Through his writings, educational activities, political campaigns, and advocacy of self-government, Tilak contributed to the expansion of nationalist consciousness in India. His emphasis on self-reliance, national education, indigenous goods, political participation, and Swarajya represented a significant development in the history of Indian nationalism. The Four-Fold Programme therefore occupies an important place in understanding the evolution of the Indian freedom movement and Tilak's contribution to the growth of nationalist thought.

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