

CHAPTER I

SPIRITUALITY AND POLITICS :

Man's religious, social and political ideas or philosophies are connected closely within a whole. These can not be strictly compartmentalised. One's political philosophy normally is an aspect of one's total world-view. Sri Aurobindo and Lokmanya Tilak were the outstanding personalities of Indian Renaissance. Both of them had made sacrifices for independence of India. The basis of their views were ~~xxxxxxxx~~ spiritual. The ideals of the Gita were expressed through their political activities.

The Struggle For Independence:

Liberty is the first requisite for the sound health and vigorous life of a nation. A foreign domination is in itself an unnatural condition, and if continued, brings about other unhealthy and unusual conditions. Therefore, the Indians were pre-occupied with the demand and struggle for freedom during pre-independence days. British rule in India may said to have started in 1757 when at the battle of Plassey the forces of the English East India Company defeated Siraj-Ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal. But the powerful national struggle against British Imperialism developed in India during the second-half of the 19th century.

From 1757 the British had used their control over India to promote their own interest. But it would be wrong to think that the character of their rule remained same throughout. It passed through several stages in its long history of nearly 200 years. The nature of British rule and imperialism as also its politics and impact changed with the changing pattern of Britain's own social, economical and political development. The political mood among the young Indians was first noticed in Bengal.

The intellectual Renaissance of India has been a potent causal factor in the rise of modern Indian Nationalism. The awakening of the Indian spirit manifested its creativism first in the realm of philosophy, religion and culture. Then political self-consciousness came as an inevitable consequence. The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 was a momentous event in the history of nationalism and freedom. During the later-half of the 19th century political consciousness of the people had been growing steadily. But the leaders failed to obtain any concession from the British rulers. At the same time the colonial exploitation continued. Lacking adequate opportunities in business and commerce, the young

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educated middle class turned more and more to the public services and the legal profession. By the turn of the century the general mood of discontent had spread to the rural gentry, the peasantry and the workers. It is not surprising, therefore, that moderate leaders who went on pleading with the government for reforms were beginning to be less and less popular. The inevitable happened. The situation created a large number of new leaders who were more radical in their demands and believed in a more militant form of nationalism.

Extremism:

Extremism is a path which goes to extremes. This term came in active use in India after the proposed partition of Bengal in 1905. Extremists were militant Nationalists. The extremism was in the womb of the Indian Renaissance. "Extremism was a response to the challenge of haphazard and superficial westernization of Indian life, thought and politics. Extremism may be said to have its birth in Indian political and national life due to the 19th century Renaissance or the social political and religious awakening that took place during the period".⁽¹⁾ Sri Aurobindo and B.G. Tilak were the two prominent leaders among the extremists. In the liberation movement, the leadership was divided

in two groups- the moderates and the extremists. Tilak said about the two wings of the National movement in his speech in Calcutta on 2nd January 1907; "the two new words recently come into existence with regard to our politics and they are Moderates and Extremists. These words have a specific relation to time and they, therefore, will change with time. The extremists of today will be moderates tomorrow just as the moderates of today were extremists yesterday." Tilak was the first to advise peasants non-payment of land revenues when their crops failed owing to drought.

The ideas of Swadeshi and Boy-cott born out of the popular feelings in 1905 were not new. The Americans, the Irish and the Chinese had adopted it before. Tilak had led a full-fledged boy-cott campaign in 1896. To Tilak and Sri Aurobindo boy-cott had many implications. It was an economic pressure, a weapon of political agitation against imperialism and a training in self-sufficiency for the attainment of Swaraj. The extremists on the whole considered political independence as more important. The radical wings of Tilak and Sri Aurobindo disclosed their views when the venue of the Congress was shifted from Poona to Surat and Tilak's claim to the Presidency was rejected.

Tilak's Political Philosophy :

If political philosophy means the speculative construction of an idealistic utopia, then Tilak has not given such picture of the politically perfect society. He does not discuss the features and possibilities of the best state like Plato and Aristotle. His main problem was the political emancipation of India and hence there is an element of great realism in his political ideas and out-look. He was well versed in the political thought of the modern West.

The dominant metaphysical assumptions of Tilak influenced his political ideas. He was a vedantist. The metaphysics of non-dualism of the Vedanta implied, according to him, the political conception of natural right. Since the spirit is the Supreme Reality and all men are portions of that absolute essence, all have the same autonomous spiritual potentialities. Advaitism taught him the supremacy of concept of freedom. Freedom according to Tilak was a divine attribute. Freedom may be equated with the autonomous power of creativity. Without freedom no moral and spiritual life is possible. Foreign imperialism paralyses the soul of a nation and that is why Tilak fought against the British. This was the philosophical foundation for the political struggles for liberty in which Tilak was engaged.

.. Tilak's View Of Nationalism :

Nationalism according to Tilak is not a visible and concrete unity, but is a kind of sentiment, an idea; and in generating this idea the historical memories of the the great figures of the century play a significant role. It must not be mis-read that Tilak was a mere Hindu nationalist. Tilak's nationalism was influenced by the Western theory of national independence and self-determination. In the famous Trial Speech of 1908 he quoted with approval J.S. Mill's definition of nationality. (2) In 1919 & 1920 he accepted the Wilsonian concept of self-determination and pleaded for its application in India. (3)

Hence Tilak's philosophy of nationalism is a synthesis of the Vedantic ideal of the spirit as supreme freedom and the Western conceptions of Mazzini, Mill and Wilson. This synthesis he expressed in terms of Swarajya, a Vedic term which was used in Maharashtra to indicate the Maratha polity of Shivaji. Due to his spiritual approach, Tilak held that Swarajya was not only a right but a Dharma. He has drawn a moral and spiritual meaning of Swarajya. Politically it meant Home Rule. Spiritually it meant the realisation of spiritual inner freedom and contemplative delight.

Tilak defined the spiritual connotation of Swarajya in this terms- "it is a life centered in self and dependent upon self. There is Swarajya in this world as well as in the world hereafter. The Rishis who laid down the law of duty betook themselves to forests, because the people were already enjoying the Swarajya or people's dominion which was administered and defended in the first instance by the Kshatriya kings."⁽⁴⁾

He was in the opinion of both political liberty and spiritual freedom. Tilak's nationalism had to some extent a revivalistic orientation. He wanted to bring ahead the message of the Vedas and the Gita for providing spiritual energy. His conception of freedom as a divine demand in man and of Swarajya as inner self-realisation, indicate his Vedantic views. He made a reconciliation between the ideal of nationalism and the Vedantic conception of human unity.

In the 'Gita-Rahasya' he visualised the eventual realisation of a society of perfect people. The realisation of the golden age, the society of the perfect souls would mean one of the profoundest revolutions in the course of human history. Hence in this broad and comprehensive sense Tilak could be called a revolutionary.

Spirituality In Tilak's Political View:

Very early in his public career Tilak discovered the need for bringing a spiritual element to the politics of the country by infusing a religious fervour. He had seen the failure to create a Missionary enthusiasm for national cause because of spiritual surrender to an alien power and ignorance of the true source of popular inspiration. He realised that no nation can hope to build a great and powerful movement without giving it a secure foundation in the spiritual life of people. He achieved this vital element through the festivals of Ganapati and Shivaji which helped India to shake off her inferiority complex and reassert her personality. He knew that once the spiritual and religious springs of India's great past were revitalised the greatness and glory of her future would be assured.

According to Sri Aurobindo tilak was a great worker and orator and he is not^{to} be judged only by the work he himself did but also by the greater work he made possible. It is_{is} correct to say that in analysing the character of Tilak the field of politics to which he devoted the best years of his life was not the one for which he was made. He was by nature a scholar and only by necessity a politician.

Political Philosophy Of Sri Aurobindo:

To Sri Aurobindo freedom is the very life breath of the nation. He speaks of political freedom as independence from British rule; but at the same time he affirms the Upanishadic ideal that the aim of human existence is the realisation of Moksha (spiritual liberation) through self-knowledge. The result is a synthesis of the Upanishadic Moksha and the political Swaraj. The content of self-knowledge is the discovery that one is essentially united with the Absolute. In the past the sages of India referred to such discovery as Moksha, and they identified Moksha largely with liberation from the phenomenal world. But Sri Aurobindo contends that talk of Moksha is premature for men who are in political bondage. A better world for man's immediate need is the experience of Swaraj. Swaraj is a word with both political and spiritual implications. It is direct revelation of God to this people, not mere political freedom but a freedom vast and entire, freedom of the nation, spiritual freedom social freedom and political freedom. To him political freedom is the first condition to a greater life and precondition of salvation.

Sri Aurobindo's nationalism is clearly derived from a metaphysics which he finds revealed in traditional Indian scriptural texts. Nationalism,

however, is but the form of the religious commitment, since the basis is the nature of reality itself. The substance of the religion is such that it must work itself into all areas of human life. Sri Aurobindo's nationalist writings of pre-Pondicherry years contain the religious view also. To him freedom was to be won through revolution and not through any weakness, cowardice, selfishness and hypocrisy. It is clear from his speeches that he emphasises upon the method of confrontation rather than withdrawal as a means by which political freedom is to be achieved.

Sri Aurobindo belonged to the new party of extremist nationalists. The reconciliation of Eastern and Western ideas are found in his writings when he refers to passive resistance and boy-cott. Since nationalism was spiritual in character, Sri Aurobindo stressed the need of moral training both for the leaders and followers. He wanted a spiritual re-orientation of political life.

Sri Aurobindo advocated the concept of "the good of all"- the 'Sarvabhutahita' of the Gita. The ultimate reality is the spiritual being, so a man should try to realise the good of all living beings in his political career and this would be the ethical standard.

freedom

Sri Aurobindo accepted the inner spiritual as an ideal. When a man becomes the agent of Supramental Spiritual Force, the mastery of nature can be eliminated. This notion of the attainment of spiritual freedom is found in the ancient Vedanta. He holds that India had learned the idea of social and political freedom from West. He defined freedom as obedience to the laws of one's ~~self~~ being which is same to the laws of God. This formulation of freedom bears Western influence, but he used this idea in the frame-work of the concept of 'Svadharna' of the Gita. According to him a perfect ^{society} can not be built by imperfect men. So, therefore, humanitarianism is not the ultimate solution of political and social problems. A spiritualised society can abolish our social and political discords, conflicts and contradictions. And he was the first prominent leaders who talked of total ~~in~~ independence. In lieu of 'Home Rule' he was in favour of political salvation of India.

The political philosophy of Sri Aurobindo was not limited to nationalism only, he was rather thinker of a 'world state'. The unity of human race implies the formation and organisation of a single world state out of a newly created natural organic unity of mankind.

On the question of the true nature of India Sri Aurobindo answered in an essay 'Bhwani Mandir' "it is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhwani Mahisha Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of Gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity."⁽⁵⁾ In a letter written to his wife he confesses three of his eccentricities, which was subsequently been produced at the trial of 'Alipore Conspiracy' case largely to show his idea about the nature of India. To him Bharat Mata was not an inert object, and not merely the fields and mountains or forests. For this seer-vision he was influenced by Bankim Chandra- the propounder of the mantra 'Bande Mataram'. Sri Aurobindo too worshiped the country as mother.

Comparison Between Tilak & Sri Aurobindo:

Sri Aurobindo regarded nationalism as Sattvika religion with God as its captain. Tilak, however, stressed the political side of the problem and he talked of organising strong agitations so that

the bureaucracy could be eliminated. The colleagues of Tilak in Bengal were little more pronounced in the statement of their political philosophy. We do not find Tilak ever spoke in terms of elimination of British political connection. But Sri Aurobindo at times spoke about absolute independence.

Tilak's political thought varied with political ~~conception~~ conception of the Bengal school of extremists nationalists. There were subtle differences between the ideas of Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. In Sri Aurobindo we find the concept of Goddess Kali as the spirit of the time. He referred ^{God} as the captain of the movement. On the other hand Tilak had a strong sense for the real and practicality. There are constant appeals in his writings and speeches for making immediate changes in the administrative mechanisms of the country and there are less emphasis on the visions of spiritualised society and gnostic community. It is true that Sri Aurobindo was remarkably inspired by the teachings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhaya, Tilak grows with the character and personality of Shivaji and Nana Fadnavis. In the character of Bengalee nationalists there is excess nationalism.

But in the Maharashtrian patriots we find a pre-dominance of accurate commonsense and sober realism. This difference in the characteristics of the two provinces reveals itself in the different theoretical approaches of Sri Aurobindo and Tilak.

Tilak emphasised the psychological conception of nationalism and said that a feeling of common belonging was essential for constituting ~~from~~ an agglomeration of people into a nation. But Sri Aurobindo stressed the spiritual-religious conception of a nation. As a realistic politician Tilak said that Swarajya was essential for freedom. But Sri Aurobindo was in the opinion of the political salvation of India, essential for the spiritual redemption of mankind. Both the leaders accepted the conception of passive resistance. According to Tilak Swadeshi and Boy-cott were the teachings of passive resistance. But to Sri Aurobindo this method had a more comprehensive meaning. It meant that resistance against an unjust law in peaceful way.

In Hindu philosophy ~~अभिहित~~ a man's liberation is not based on the grace of somebody, but is to be attained by action. To be spiritually free, there must be the will to be free.

Tilak represented the school of Indian political thought which advocated that if India were to be free then there must be a resolute will to be free supported by actions which cause sufferings. A political leader must be a Karma-Yogi and not an opportunist. Sri Aurobindo was influenced in this respect by B.G. Tilak remarkably. He had no prejudice to appreciate the views of Tilak and his interpretation of the Gita.

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