



Lokmanya Tilak and Labour Movement

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Abstract:

The prime purpose of the current study was to apprehend the association of great freedom fighter and India's national leader Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the labour movement. Lokmanya Tilak was the founder of Swaraj and worked relentlessly for the betterment of working class. He had a vision of nourished and developed India. And to fulfil his vision of obtaining Swaraj and called out the workers to improve their status. In the present paper we will scrutinize how Tilak undertook the task of social awareness through daily 'Kesari' and how he made people aware of the economic plunder which was taking place in India. He made people aware of nationality.

Keywords: Labour Movement, Swaraj, Philosophy, Social Awareness, Self-determination

Lokmanya Tilak and Labour Movement:

We discern Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak as the spokesman of Swaraj. From the study of Indian and Western philosophy and history, Tilak had ascertained his approach for the cause of Swaraj. Tilak not only brought together all the people of Hindustan, divided into several languages, religions and castes, to awaken nationalism in them but also put aside reforms and casteist movements to divide the struggle for self-determination.

There was no participation of common people in the independent struggle of 1857. Therefore, Lokmanya knew that the idea of Swaraj would not be possible unless the common man become aware of nationalism, a nation.

Tilak did not approve of the Congress's decision to meet once or twice a year and ask the British for something. Tilak knew that the mission of obtaining Swaraj was full time. For this, he undertook the task of social awareness through daily 'Kesari'. He made people aware of how economic plunder is taking place in India through different mediums. He made people aware of nationalism.

One of the reasons for the War of Independence of 1857 was the use of cow and pig fat greased cartridges. Hence, the British decided not to pay heed to religious issues. In the backdrop, Tilak initiated public Ganesh Utsav in 1894 to bring together people of all castes and religions. Bappa, who was in the temple and the house, was installed on the road as a national festival. The festival-loving community accepted Ganpati Utsav in a very short period of time. Tilak started educating people by using speeches, fairs, music and kirtan.

Along with Ganesh Utsav, Tilak started two other movements like, Famine Code and ban of Alcohol. Consequently, farmers, workers, non-Brahmin society started accepting the leadership of Lokmanya.

Through Ganesh Utsav and Shiv Jayanti, people comprehended Lokmanya Tilak's Fourfold vis. Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. Tilak knew that India's economy was 90 per cent dependent on agriculture. In order to set up agro-processing industries he tried to alter in agricultural implements, and seeds.

Tilak's philosophy was based on modernity, reality and practicality. He commented on agricultural issues like sugar factories, yarn industry, weavers and also tried to create industrial sector by creating indigenous banks, indigenous shops, skill development, he tried to improve co-operative principles as well. As a result, not only the farmers' class but also the casteless working class was created in India at that time.

Tilak was the first to introduce Communism and Karl Marx to India in the Mahratta newspaper dated May 1, 1881. Such information was given by Late. Professor J. V. Naik of the Mumbai University in the 6th session of the Indian History Congress. Tilak's commentary on labour is wealth and class struggle has been published. After reading Tilak's preface, the passion for Hindi workers became clear.

Tilak says that Karl Marx's "Communist Manifesto" was very important with the progress of human culture. In his 1881 article, Tilak elaborated on Marx's in-depth analysis of the ruthless exploitation of workers by the capitalist class and the resulting class struggle. (Reference: (Velkar, 2012))

The public Ganesh Utsav started by Lokmanya Tilak also expanded in Mumbai. A large number of workers used to participate in Ganesh Utsav, Tilak himself used to visit Ganesh Utsav Mandals, thousands of people used to gather at his meetings in Mumbai to listen to Tilak's thoughts. After the partition of Bengal, Tilak's indigenous and boycott principles received a huge response from the general public and workers.

The threat of Tilak's growing popularity was noticed by the English Governor, who demanded that the Viceroy banish Tilak. The British got the reason for the bomb blast in Muzaffarpur. Tilak on this incident wrote four articles in Kesari. On May 12, 1908, "Deshache Durdaiv, and on May 19, 1908, "Duheri Ishara, on June 2, 1908, Bomb Golyache Rahassya, on June 9, 1908, 'He Upay Tikau Nahit. The British government was waiting for such moments. They arrested the editor of the newspaper 'Kaal' P. Shivram Paranjape and on 11th June 1908, punished him 19 month rigorous imprisonment for the sedition case.

Many have come to the conclusion that the Tilak will be arrested and punished. Tilak had already informed that he would be arrested when he go to give advice to Paranjape. Tilak smiled and replied, 'What should I do, Should I move the army to stop the attack on the fort, or should I dig trenches? The government has imprisoned the entire nation. To go to prison at such a time is like going from a large cell to a small cell. A warrant was issued to Tilak on June 23. When Barrister Jinnah stood up to argue with public prosecutor Branson, Justice Davar stopped him, Davar said, 'Don't take side.' I am eliminating the bail application without any discussion. Barrister Baptist argued for the establishment of a jury, but it too got rejected. The trial began on July 13, 1908. Tilak defended himself as punishment was imminent. Barrister Jinnah has mentioned the incident in his biography. Rather than proving his acquittal, Tilak wanted to convey the direction of India's freedom struggle to the people more

willingly than defend himself. Tilak became a symbol of national honour as a person who promoted India's political aspirations. Tilak made his own argument in court for three and a half days, i.e. 21 hours and ten minutes. But the jury ruled by a two-to-seven majority. Justice Chagla has recorded Tilak's statement on the same in the Mumbai High Court.

‘All I wish to say is that in spite of the verdict of the jury, I maintain that I am innocent. There are higher powers that rule the destiny of things and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent is to prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free.’

Before the sentencing of Lokmanya Tilak, it was evident to what extent the government was terrified of Tilak's popularity and how it was decided to convict him.

The verdict was given at 10 pm and Tilak was taken to Surat through another door. But it is important to give the details to the readers about the preparation that the government had made in Mumbai. In Mumbai, Garrison had arranged in three military regiments. Five thousand English soldiers were kept ready. An armed regiment of Indian soldiers was also ready. 1274 Home-guards were prepared. All of them were equipped with rifles bayonets and cannons. In addition, the police force and 85 British officers were armed with revolvers. 2038 Reserve Indian and Armed Police Force were present.

News of Tilak's deportation spread quickly in India. Workers spontaneously called a six-day strike and staged protests in Mumbai. Two lakh workers were also on strike for six days as punishment for six years. Lenin took note of the strike. But after a peaceful strike and protest, the police gave a violent turn to it. The army was called in. Fifteen people were killed and 38 were injured in the shooting.

Manchester Guardian had said - Considering the nature of the punishment meted out to Mr. Tilak, the government had decided to do anything to get him out of the way. This incident will be looked at in India as proof of this.

Prior to 1918, there was not a single worker union in India that looked after the welfare of the workers. The International Trade Union Confederation was formed in 1919. Prior to this, along with other trade unions, the Indian Labour League and Hind Mazur Sangh defended the welfare of mills, factories, post, western and Central Railway workers in the Mumbai area.

The office of Hindu Mazur Sangh was at Lady Jamshedji Road, Dadar. The President of the league was Barrister Pawar and the Secretary was S. V. Gawde. Dr. D. D. Sathe and Dr. M. B. Velkar were on the All India Committee of the Labour League. Dr. Sathe and Velkar were very popular in the working class at that time as co-workers of Lokmanya and activists of Ganesh Utsav and Shiv Jayanti celebrations. He had gone to work in a labour camp during the plague epidemic in Mumbai.

In 1890, the municipal cleaning workers in Mumbai stopped their work. At that time, 'Kesari' stood tall in their favour. In 1899, G. I. P. the asphalt and bituminous master of the railways went on strike. In 1903, Kesari had strongly opposed the planter labour bill brought against the tea plantation workers. In 1907, Tilak said, 'Labour movements are not national but social and economic, but the national movement and the labour movement cannot be divided. If Hindustan gets the right of Swaraj by excluding the Hindi Majoor Sangh from the national movement, then bureaucracy of British will go and black bureaucracy will be obtained and it will not be any actual Swaraj. In fact, in 1906, Lokmanya Tilak first suggested in a public meeting that a strong union of Indian workers should be formed to fight against the

government for the rights of the workers. Tilak's policy of opposing the Indian labour movement against bureaucracy was one of the ways to achieve Swaraj. And so, Lala Lajpat Rai made the following remarks about Lokmanya Tilak: "Tilak's return to India, it might be said as a nationalist labour leader."

Lokmanya Tilak returned to India in 1914 after being imprisoned in Mandalay. He then re-established the Swaraj movement by forming the Indian Home Rule League or Hind Swaraj Sangh. The British Parliament decided to send a delegation to London, as well as a delegation from the Indian Labour League, to demand the Home Rule League.

After the end of the First World War, Montague Chelmsford decided to send a delegation to the British Parliament as a step towards Hindvi Swaraj. Lokmanya Tilak, Dr. Velkar, Shri. N. M. Joshi were the members of the executive. But since Mr. N. M. Joshi was a representative of the British government, Dr. Sathe was chosen in his place.

The Hind Mazur Sangh decided in a meeting of its executive board on 16th July 1919 that the plight of Hindi workers should be reduced to 8 hours instead of 12 hours, one day a week and paid leave on festive days etc. The grievances of the Hindi workers should be successfully presented to the British Parliament by the delegates and for this the British Labour Party should be requested to bring satisfactory amendments to the law on the principle of equality in respect of labour and capital.

Lokmanya Tilak and Dr. Velkar gave lectures at a meeting held in Edinburgh, Scotland by students union, Indian Association and trade union Congress. The meeting was attended by hundreds of English workers.

The London branch of the International Brotherhood Welfare Association was to be inaugurated on September 25. The International Labour Organization (ILO) held a meeting in London to accumulate the workers from the United States and England. Indian workers should also join the international organization in order to establish workers' rights. Therefore, Lokmanya Tilak and Dr. Velkar were specially invited. Both were seated on the platform on the day of the meeting and addressed the gathering.

Tilak said, 'The labour movement in India is still in its infancy. When it takes place in a grand manner in all the countries, it will be seen that the labour movement here will be commanded and will also cooperate with the world organization. (Reference: 03 October 1919 India: London) ((V.D.Divekar, 1997) (B., 1919))

When Lokmanya Tilak was on a tour of England, Lord Wellington, the Governor of Mumbai, had insulted Lokmanya Tilak in a meeting by not allowing him to speak on home rule. When the governor retired and returned home, the Swarajists, led by Barrister Jinnah and B. G. Hartiman, had gathered at Town Hall on December 11, 1918, to protest against the plan of honouring him and his memorial. To evict them, the monumentalists and the mill owners had brought in hired mill workers. But in reality the mill workers sided with the Swarajists and overthrew the Wellington Monument as a resolution. Swarajists thus changed Tilak's humiliation. The working class was the main participant.

In London, on 30th September 1919, the railway workers went on strike on behalf of the International Union. Many labour meetings were held at the Royal Albert Hall and Tower Hill. Lokmanya Tilak and Dr. Velkar attended the meeting. A photo of him had been published in London's Daily Mail newspaper. The exhausted workers won. Lokmanya Tilak also listened to the grievances of Hindi workers before the parliamentary committee

appointed by the British government to respond to the demands of Hindi Swaraj Sangh and Hindi Mazur Sangh. The Indian Labour League delegation returned home after receiving assurances from the committee about the demands of eight working hours a day, one day a week paid leave and a paid holiday for various religious festivals etc.

On his return to Mumbai, Tilak was felicitated by the workers' union on November 29, 1919 in the grand courtyard of Elphinstone Mill. According to the report of Lok Sangraha Daily, a community of twenty to twenty five thousand people had gathered at the meeting. It was also decided at this meeting that a separate newspaper should be issued for the workers and it was decided that Kesari should print the articles about the workers till its publication.

Responding to the award, Tilak said it was very instructive, "A strong union of workers should be formed to fight against the policy and establish the rights. How do you fight against government policy alone? You have to team up to exercise your rights personally, but when the team gets stronger, you have to go to jail. Rights are not obtained without suffering. The government has imposed a representative of its choice on you." Tilak further says, "Seeing the situation in the country, we should also join this movement. I want to draw the attention of the working class in my country just like in the western countries. In 1906 and 1907, I organized a massive anti-alcohol movement across Maharashtra to discourage the working class from becoming addicted to alcohol. But the movement was thwarted by the government. I really want to improve the life of common man. Mumbai belongs to the working people. Wealth in Mumbai depends on leaving one's Konkan home and moving to Mumbai. Who, then, would love to see the workers languishing in misery? The newly established factories and mills in our country, which are in a state of industrial decline, have to compete with the factories which have the backing of the foreign monarchy. The struggle between the workers and the capitalists and the improper distribution of wealth must end." After that, Lokmanya Tilak passed away within a year and a half. This caused a lot of damage to the labour movement.

In an article written by B.R. Sukhtankar in the Maharashtra Times said, 'Tilak has done some more research on his love for workers. In it Lokmanya Tilak said, you have to put aside caste, religion, etc. and unite. Make sure the labour unions in England stand behind you. In fact, they have entrusted me with the task of conveying this message to you. You will not get your demands as a gift from heaven; the hands given to you are not for work but for what? Work is not just physical work. God also helps those who help themselves in national work. You are the master of your future, in the future workers will get a place of prestige and everyone should work towards that goal. Within a few years, the European-American state became powerful. This work has been done by the workers. Also, why shouldn't it happen in our Hindustan? A situation should arise where a person who wants to work will not go hungry without work. Opponents will try to mislead you by saying that you have no political rights, but you should not fall for it. This movement is not for the benefit of some senior class but for the benefit of Bahujan Samaj. I come from the common people, wants to work for the common man. I will die as a common man, I am a genuine democrat. I consider it a great honour to be your spokesperson.

Workers do not care which government is in power. They care that under the government they should be able to live a better life. If the government does not want workers to go after politicians, then it must fulfil its duty to provide a better standard of living for them.

Wealth is created by the workers. So, the wealth belongs to the hands that make it. That is why I say that you have a right to a fair share of the wealth you create through your labour. I told the workers of Mumbai that they are the owners of Mumbai and not capitalists. That's what I'm telling you here. Capitalists should get only the right interest on their capital and apart from that rest workers should get it.

The first thing you need to know is that I am a labourer just like you. You work with your hands. I work with both my hands and my head. In England, all those who work with both hands and head are called labourers. So we are all labourers. A country where workers cannot live well is not worth living. A government that cannot provide a good living for its workers is not doing its duty. This principle is accepted by England and other western countries. And this is the principle that the leading nations must accept in the case of their respective countries. (Reference: Courtesy of (Sunthakar, 1990))

A colleague of Lady Besant, B. T. Wadia was working to unite the workers in Madras. A separate meeting of workers was organized the next day to felicitate Tilak on his initiative. The keynote address was delivered by Tilak after the award was presented by the Madras Labour Union. Lokmanya said, 'After I came back from England, the workers in Mumbai also honoured me. While addressing them, I could speak in the language of the workers. Today, I feel very sorry that I cannot speak your language; but your enthusiasm and your passion are as important to me as the Mumbai workers.

As long as you run your movement legally, it cannot be said to be wrong. The police in England get three pounds per door, which is about 130 rupees per month. Here you don't even get eight annas per day. If this situation is to be improved, the way to do that is to strengthen your organizations. Your ignorance, your disregard for your own interests does not improve the situation. If you unite, it will change.

This honour given by Non-Brahmins and workers was a mark of honour for Lokmanya Tilak. Lokmanya and the working class had a special relationship. Before going to England for the Chirol trial, on 24th February 1918, the workers of Mumbai had given a citation to Lokmanya. At this meeting, he was also offered a bag of one thousand rupees for Swaraj Fund. The amount was too small; but its value was immense. Sixteen thousand workers of Mumbai had collected this amount. (Sixteen annas used to be one rupee.)

Two lakh workers work in Mumbai's mills. Most of them are from Konkan. His forefathers lived on farms in the Konkan. Now they cannot survive in Konkan. Workers come to Mumbai to avoid begging; but due to various addictions, they dry up again and return to Konkan. When they are in Konkan, they used to cop-out drudgery with jaggery and a glass of cold water. Now why a cup of tea or a glass of wine is required?' He had asked such a question. "If everyone, including the workers, rewards Swadeshi, it will be used to reduce poverty in the country."

Tilak was the first Indian national leader to recognize the importance of workers and trade unions. That is why they considered the issue of workers as important as the issue of farmers. (Reference: (Chapalgaonkar, 2020))

In Indian Labour League, Report, Message Newspaper. Complete lecture of Lokmanya Tilak on 16/07/1919, Dr. M B. Velkar's diary entries, (B., 1919) Dr. V. D. Divekar's book titled 'Tilak in London', (V.D.Divekar, 1997), Dr. J. V. Naik's research essay and many other basic researches provide new information about Lokmanya Tilak and Indian workers (

(J.V.Naik, 1998). Tilak had also accepted the post of vice-president of 'Aitak'. While reading this information, it is possible that one may think that Tilak was a communist thinker. But Tilak has made it clear in his honouring ceremony to his workers that 'I am a true democrat.' Seeing the plight of the peasants and weavers, Lokmanya Tilak united them to solve their problems and make them aware of their rights. Tilak also says in one place, 'Indigenous industries are now in their infancy, at such a time a movement that will create tension between employers and workers is a factor in the prosperity of this country. But workers need to be paid for their labour.' Lokmanya Tilak was a visionary leader and he felt the need to unite people from all walks of life and stand behind independence. Due to these views of Lokmanya Tilak, in December 1916, at the Lucknow Congress Convention, people of all castes, religions and classes came together and unanimously demanded Swaraj. The greatest achievement though was the favourable contact with the Labour Party and informing the English people, who were the source of power of the British government, about the plight and aspirations of the Indian people who were under their rule. Tilak addressed every meeting that he could and established good relations with the Labour Party. He was perhaps amongst the first few to recognise that the mood in England was changing and the Labour Party was sympathetic to the cause of India. He, therefore, subscribed to its fund and gave a cheque of 2000 pounds which, was gratefully acknowledged by it with an assurance that it would do everything in its power to enable India to obtain Swaraj. Tilak and his colleagues utilized the platform of the Labour Party to address mass meetings of workers from Glasgow, Edinburgh, Plymouth and Southampton. All this is to make the readers of Kesari understand the role of Lokmanya Tilak in the field of labour and their problems.

Conclusion:

The communal strength of Mumbai's working class society – port workers, textile mill workers, employees, minor merchants and sellers, the informal division workers – had formed the city. Their participation in the independence movement was true and real and, for decades afterwards, their narratives became oral stories of the movement in blue-collar areas.

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