

Lokmanya Tilak's Thoughts on Indian Agriculture

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1. Introduction

Lokmanya Balgandhar Tilak was multi-dimensional personality. He was well-known for this contribution in the field of national movement, beside that; he was successful in spreading the idea of 'nationalism' among the common people. He advocated 'Swarajya', which is nothing but the government established by ourselves. It is the government of free India. He was curious, creative, courageous and open to learn the new experiences. He was a scholar of 'Sanskrit' and 'Astro-Mathematics'. His intellectual contribution in the field of writings shows the deep understanding of him about the subjects. He made a commentary on 'Bhagvad Gita', which is known as 'Geeta Rahasya'. He is

known as 'selfless' national leader, who fought for the cause of people by paying high sacrifice. The four fold programme introduced by Tilak during British India became most successful. This four-fold programme includes 'Swaraj', 'Swadeshi', 'Boycot' and 'National Education'. The ultimate goal of this path of this programme was to get the freedom from British government and also to reach the self-reliant economic growth. This strategy made him more popular among the people. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was most successful national leader, which brought deep impact on national movement. He became mass leader and people granted him the title as 'Lokmanya'.

Lokmanya Tilak was not known as an economist in the sense that he did not produce any systematic treatise on any of the aspects of economic problems affecting the life of the people, but he was enough of an economist who ably studied current economic, material, industrial, agricultural and related topics as they cropped up, made their root-going study and made suggestions for their treatment in the best interests of the country. He criticised official tariff, trade, transport and taxation policies as obstructing instead of promoting the growth of industry and as bringing about ever-increasing de-industrialisation of the country. He was opposed to large-scale import of foreign capital in railways, plantations and industries and the facilities afforded to them by the Government.

2. Lokmanya Tilak's Thoughts on Agricultural Development

The position of Indian agriculture was not favourable for Indian but favourable for British government. The policies of the British government motivated the commercialization of agriculture in India by promoting cash crops and providing markets for their sale. The introduction of modern technologies and irrigation in selected area, especially cash crop area, brought several favourable changes. However, in large part of India, 'British' government policies overburdened the agriculture sector, leading to poverty. The government increased the land revenue despite of low income earning by the farmers. The government policies favoured cash crops over food crops, which created food scarcity and increased food prices. The government policies led the destruction of the self-sufficient village population.

In this 'British' period, there was one leader who paying attention to the Indian agriculture and government policies. Lokmanya Tilak criticized the government policies towards the Indian agriculture. He wrote several articles in 'Kesari' and 'Mharatta' on Indian agriculture. The writings of Lokmanya Tilak on Indian agriculture show that, he was a matured agricultural economist. Some of the selected thoughts of Lokmanya Tilak on Indian agriculture are discussed as below.

2.1 Writing on Indian Agricultural Issues:

Lokmanya Tilak continuously drew public attention to the land problem of India and its various aspects. These were India's agriculture and its stunted growth, land revenue assessment, periodical revenue settlements, famines and scarcity years, inadequacy of relief and so on. Of all the problems of Indian Agriculture, the national leadership attached the greatest importance to the system of assessment and the pitch of land revenue. The land revenue policy of the Government of India (British Government) was considered to be the main cause of the poverty and destitution of the peasant and of the backwardness of agriculture. In the course of a series of articles contributed to the Journal of the 'Poona Sarvajanic Sabha', Ranade initiated this indictment of official policy and leaders from all parts of India followed his lead. In 1879, in his article on the 'Agrarian Problem and its Solution' he pointed out that the operations of the Bombay Revenue Department had 'pauperised the country'. In the article 'Land Law Reform and Agricultural Banks' published in 1881, he contended that no other agrarian reform would 'lead to any permanent beneficial result as long as the pressure of land revenue under the existing system of assessment continues unabated' and laid down that 'the state monopoly of land and its right to increase the assessment at its own discretion are the two pre-eminent obstacles in the way of the growth of our material prosperity'.

2.2 Importance of Agricultural Economy:

Lokmanya Tilak paid attention to Indian Agriculture, since this sector was an important sector for the development of Indians. He was aware that India is primarily an agricultural driven country. Lokmanya Tilak was the only leader at that time to see how significant the role of agriculture was in national economy. He considered the importance of agricultural economics as the focal point in Indian Economics. According to Tilak the Indian economy was dependent on agriculture. 80 per cent of the Indian people in 19th and 20th centuries depended on agriculture. He therefore made efforts to educate the farmers so that they would realize the benefits of modern equipment, better seeds, fertilizers and new techniques to improve their income from the limited available land. Tilak made efforts to educate the farmers so that they would realize the benefits of modern equipment. Better seeds, fertilizers and new agricultural techniques were promoted through his writings

2.3 Famine and Farmers:

There was famine in India during 1896-97, which also hit that time 'Bombay Presidency'. During famine years, he had suggested a simple solution of recruiting at least one person per family in industrial units thereby reducing the strain on the suffering families in famine. During famine days he translated the 'Famine Code' into Marathi which was originally in English language. He did not stop there but educated the farmers about 'Famine Code' by publishing

around forty editorial articles in 'Kesari'. When the famine struck, he urged the British government to suspend the collection of land revenue from the people. He started a campaign of 'No Tax' during famine. He also urged the people to not to pay the tax. As a result of several efforts from Lokmanya Tilak, the British government finally accepted to introduce the relief measures for the farmers and other people.

2.4 Modernization of Agriculture:

Lokmanya Tilak was a visionary in terms of agricultural development. He believed that, development of agriculture is possible only through a way of modernization. According to him, modernization was helpful to improve the income of the farmers from the limited available land. He also has encouraged them to use food processing technology to counter the effects of famine. He strongly viewed that India cannot prosper only with agricultural sector and traditional based farming methods as there was lack of technical knowledge and industrial base. Lokmanya Tilak considered farming as the backbone of Indian economy and the replacement of traditional farming by mechanical farming would be helpful for economic development

2.5 Agro-Industries:

Tilak believed that agricultural development is possible in the villages through the development of agro industries. The financial prosperity can be gained in India, if the rural industries are set up at large scale. He believed that, the rural industries can be a base of development. He suggested to establish the agricultural processing industries and small scale agro industries. For this, Tilak focused the cotton production and urged the farmers to produce high quality cotton. The growth of cotton industries in India can save Rs. 20 crores every year.

Lokmanya Tilak also had believed the importance of sugarcane in establishing agro industries or sugar industries. He was the first to identify that the 'Maharashtra' soil was more adaptive to sugarcane production. He emphasized on research in agricultural sector so that good quality and more quantity could be produced. He however, opposed the import of sugar from Mauritius (it was under British regime in those days) as the sugarcane produced in Maharashtra was of the same quality as that produced in Mauritius, but we lacked the technology to further process it to refined sugar. His idea was to gain technological expertise from Mauritius for sugar production instead of importing readymade sugar. He believed, in few years time as we gain the expertise of production, we will prepare sugar on our own.

2.6 Land Ownership:

Lokmanya Tilak also gave clear thoughts on land ownership, especially with respect to 'Khoti' system. 'Khots' were nothing but landlords or money lenders, who used to collect revenue from the tenants. In 1879, the government passed the Agricultural Relief Act to bring much needed relief to the peasants who were being exploited not only by the landlords but also by the money-lenders. The provisions of the Act were moderate. It prohibited the mortgage of land and its transfer on that basis. Tilak's reaction was furious. He took the side of the money-lenders and criticized the Act through his articles in the 'Kesari'. His argument was that it was wrong to hold money-lenders responsible for the plight of the peasants.

In fact, it was the moneylenders who provide them with capital to continue cultivation. Moreover, the moneylenders themselves borrowed huge amounts from the urban bankers at a slightly lesser rate of interest. The act provided protection to the peasants but it left the money-lenders totally unprotected. It led to rivalries between the peasants and money-lenders. Hence, the Government action in this regard was improper. The law must therefore be scrapped or withdrawn without delay. Tilak was angered by the proposed legislation and wrote a series of articles in the '*Kesari*' criticising it. Here his main argument was that '*Khot-tenant*' relations in Konkan were defined by age old traditions. Tilak argued that the authority of the government was limited to the revenue demand. It should not cross the limit and attempt to decide the wages or the

service conditions of the workers. Tilak pointed out that the government should not interfere with the Khot-tenant relationship

2.7 Agricultural Dependency:

Lokmanya Tilak was keen on the development of agriculture. He suggested several ways of development of Indian agriculture. He believed that there was need of modernization of agriculture for the betterment of income of peasants. Besides these, he also had emphasized the need of parallel employment in non-agricultural sector. He believed that, there was over burden of population in agriculture sector. There was a need to reduce the dependent population on agriculture. He had clear understanding that, the agriculture sector was unable to create large size of employment; therefore he suggested shifting a part of population from agriculture to non-agriculture sector. The industries had greater potential to absorb the large population in terms of employment. The dependency rate is reduced then only the agriculture would become profitable. He believed that, the British government policies were against the Indian farmers and their development. Therefore, farmers should think in creating agro-processing industries and other types of small industries. The large dependency of people on agriculture was bringing a burden on farmers.

2.8 Interdependence between Agriculture and Industry:

The close inter-dependence between agricultural and industrial progress was stressed every now and then by the 'Mahratta' and the 'Kesari'. The Mahratta wrote on 4th September, 1881 "There is superfluity of agricultural labour in the agricultural labour market and unless that is removed from it and employed elsewhere, no remedial measure to improve the wretched condition of the agriculturist will be productive of permanent good results. The development of agricultural and mechanical industry must be simultaneous. Similarly in its issue of February 12, 1882, the Mahratta argued that "no mere legislation, no banks, not even the permanency of land tenure would go to improve the condition of the peasantry without the introduction of several industries since no merely agricultural country could ever prosper." The problem of development of agriculture and the economic condition of the peasantry was viewed by many Indian leaders in the wider context of Indian economy and their conclusion was that progress of agriculture was inevitably connected with industrial development and that unless the tendency towards ruralisation of the country was reversed all other efforts were bound to be found short of the real requirement.

3) Conclusion:

Lokmanya Tilak's thoughts on Indian agriculturæ were most relevant during 'British' period. The significance of agriculture in Indian economy was highlighted by him. According to him, agriculture was the backbone of Indian economy, hence it must be promoted. The farmers must take lead in developing their farm with the help of modernization. The benefit of cooperation and market should be taken by the farmers. The wrong practices introduced by 'British' government were opposed by him. Tilak's thoughts on agriculture have strong relevance even today. His thoughts about the modernization and mechanization of agriculture must be praised

Key Points of Tilak's Thoughts on Agriculture

- Importance of agriculture: Tilak believed agriculture was the backbone of India's economy, employing a large population and providing sustenance.
- Self-sufficiency: He advocated for self-sufficiency in food production, reducing dependence on imports and foreign aid.
- Irrigation and water management: Tilak emphasized the need for improved irrigation systems and water management to increase agricultural productivity.
- Crop diversification: Tilak encouraged farmers to diversify crops, reducing dependence on a single crop and promoting sustainable agriculture.
- Support for farmers: He believed in providing support to farmers through fair prices, credit facilities, and protection from exploitation.
- Agricultural education: Tilak advocated for agricultural education and training programs to enhance farmers' skills and knowledge.
- Cooperative farming: He promoted cooperative farming practices, enabling small farmers to benefit from collective resources and expertise.
- Critique of British policies: Tilak criticized British policies, which he believed neglected Indian agriculture, leading to poverty, famine, and exploitation.

- Swadeshi movement: Tilak's Swadeshi movement encouraged the use of Indian-made goods, including agricultural products, to promote self-reliance.
- Agricultural-based industries: He advocated for industries based on agricultural products, like sugar, oil, and cotton.

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