

Lokmanya Tilak's Thoughts on Labour Movement

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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. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a person with remarkable intellect, and he proclaimed few research papers and articles in 'Kesari'. The articles on various issues were contributing to and foundational dependencies of Indian economy.

2. Lokmanya Tilak and Labour Movement

Lokmanya Tilak also has given contribution to the field of labour economics. He has worked for the labour movement in India. Lokmanya Tilak was the 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. He undertook the task of social awareness about the working class and related issues through daily 'Kesari' and how he made people aware of the economic plunder which was taking place in India. Tilak not only brought together all the people of India, divided into several languages, religions and castes, to awaken nationalism in them.

2.1 Awakening of New Consciousness

During the national movement period, Lokmanya Tilak was active with his strategy of freedom. There was lack consciousness of labour power during British rule. Tilak introduced the 'Swadeshi' movement. This was a new movement appeared in the national life of our country. The 'Swadeshi' movement and the agitation against the partition of Bengal (1905) provided a favourable atmosphere for the growth of trade union movement in British India. The six days' political strike by the workers of Bombay in 1908 against the judgement sentencing Lokmanya Tilak to six years imprisonment was considered a landmark in our labour movement. A new consciousness started developing among the workers

2.2 Writing on Labour Issues:

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. 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 wrote on various issues related to labour class and made them aware of 'British' government policies. This was an effort to make the people aware of nationalism. Tilak initiated public Ganesh Utsav in 1894 to bring together people of all castes and religions. 'Ganesh', 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'.

2.3 Awareness of Labour Class

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.

However, the 'British' government's this move was criticized by Tilak in several article wrote in 'Kesari'. This effort and fearless role of Tilak brought all labour class together. This was the success of 'Ganesh Utsav' and Lokmanya Tilak

2.4 Communism and Labour:

Tilak was the first to introduce Communism and Karl Marx to India in the 'Mahratta' newspaper dated May 1, 1881. 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. This shows that, Tilak was aware of working class struggle going at international level. He also referred the international intellectual contribution made in the labour movement.

2.5 Support to Labour Unions :

Lokmanya Tilak took leadership in the formation of labour unions and participation of them in national movement. He thought that, the labour unions are essential for the welfare of labour class as well as to oppose the 'British' government policies in order to achieve 'Swaraj' . 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. In 1890, the municipal cleaning workers in Mumbai stopped their work. At that time, 'Kesari' stood tall in their favour. In 1899, The Great Indian Peninsular (G. I. P.) went on strike. In 1903, Kesari had strongly opposed the planter labour bill brought against the tea plantation workers. Every time, Tilak stood in favour of 'labour' unions.

2.6 Labour Union and National Movement

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. 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

2.7 AITUC Labour Union:

Tilak had also accepted the post of vice-president of '**All India Trade Union Congress** (AITUC). AITUC was the trade union federation in India. It was associated with Communist Party of India. 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 (labour class) to solve their problems and make them aware of their rights. There was a big strike by industrial workers of Bombay from July 24 to 28, 1908, in protest against the pronouncement of judgment sentencing six years imprisonment to freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak. There were street fights between workers and police and military of British rulers. Tilak also says in one place, 'Indigenous industries are now in their infancy, at such a time a labour 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.'

2.8 Addressing the Labour Party in England:

Lokmanya Tilak visited England in the year 1908 for 'Chirole' trail. During the visit, he met many leaders of labour who were elected representatives in British parliament. He also has explored the labour unions in

England and addressed various issues existed in both countries 'England' and 'India'. He could establish 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.

3. Conclusion

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. 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

Key Points of Tilak's Thoughts on Labour:

- **Rights of Workers:** He advocated for rights of workers as fair wages, better working conditions and free from exploitation
- **Labour Unions:** Supported the formation of trade unions to protect interests of the workers and promote collective bargaining.
- **Socialistic Influence:** He was influenced by socialist ideas and believed in the redistribution of wealth to reduce economic inequalities.
- **Promotion of Indigenous Industries:** He encouraged the use of Indian-made goods and the development of indigenous industries to create employment opportunities.
- **Basic Needs for Labour:** He emphasized the need for education, healthcare, and social welfare programs for workers.
- **Importance for Labour Force:** He believed that labour was essential for the growth and development of a nation. He emphasized the need to recognize the value of labour and protect the rights of workers.
- **Swadeshi:** 'Swadeshi' movement encouraged Indians to boycott British goods and promote indigenous industries
- **Employment Opportunities:** Advocated to create employment opportunities for Indians and reduce dependence on foreign labour.

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