

GANDHI MARG

VOLUME 46 • NUMBER 2 • JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024



Gandhi Peace Foundation
New Delhi

GANDHI MARG

Quarterly Journal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation

VOLUME 46 □ NUMBER 2 □ JULY-SEPTEMBER 2024

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Gandhi Marg Quarterly

46(2): 197–218

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<http://gandhimargjournal.org/>

ISSN 0016–4437

Ethnicity, Religion, and Language: Locating Nationalism and Nation in the Political Thought of Bal Gangadhar Tilak

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ABSTRACT

Cultural nationalism is a variant of ethnic nationalism, and in Tilak's thoughts, there was a fusion of cultural, ethnic, and religious nationalism. Tilak endorsed the Indo-Aryan culture to proclaim the ethnic identity of Hindus for social assimilation, which was necessary to articulate a movement for political autonomy. He was a political pragmatist and shrewd strategist. He constantly shifted his stand on what represents India and lacked consistency in his ideas. His thoughts underwent paradigm shifts over the decades. His nationalist thoughts must be examined in three major timelines to understand them: from 1875 to 1890, 1891 to 1907, and 1914 to 1920. Tilak emphasised not only developing common characters for all Indian languages but eventually developing a common national language. The present paper tries to analyse the nationalist political narratives of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and how he employed resources such as ethnicity, religion, and language to construct the idea of nationalism and nationalism for colonized Indian society.

Key words: *Culture, Ethnicity, Language, Nationalism, Religion.*

ETHNICITY, RELIGION, AND language play an essential role in constructing ideas, nationalism, and nation. Ethnicity, in the context of nationalism, is consistently labelled as the marker of national identity in modern times. Nationalism and ethnicisation are inter-related phenomena, attempted when the political and the ethnic

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borders of a nation are not harmonious. Indian nationalism is an ethnocultural movement endorsed by the social elites of nineteenth-century India who attempted to create an ethnic identity with determinants like common ancestry, shared history, distinct culture, territorial associations, and active solidarity. Although all aspired for self-determination, they had ideological differences among them. Moderates propounded constitutional means of resistance and civic nationalism, while extremists adhered to cultural nationalism and extra-constitutional means for decolonisation. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a firebrand nationalist, was hailed by extremists and cultural nationalists as their ultimate leader. He expanded the scope of the national movement from an intellectual exercise of a tiny elite segment of Congress into a mass movement to overthrow colonisation. The present paper makes an effort to analyse the nationalist political narratives of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and how he employed resources such as ethnicity, religion, and language to construct ideas of nationalism and nationalism for the colonized Indian society.

Nationalism and Ethnic Consciousness

Cultural nationalism is a variant of ethnic nationalism, and in Tilak's thoughts, there was a fusion of cultural, ethnic, and religious nationalism. Ethnicisation or racialisation, is a socio-political movement directed by elites to revive and eulogise ethnic myths to construct ethnocultural consciousness and brotherhood for nation-building, community autonomy, decolonisation, and self-determination. Ethnicity includes religion, language, customs, institutions, music, art, food, dress, colour, and territory. It is the interrelation between these indicators which defines an ethnic identity¹. Constructivists believe that 'nations are not anything real, objective, or indispensable; they are only "constructs," contingent and artificial, deliberately created by various elites'². Since 1860, Hindu cultural elements such as folklore, symbols, and other artifacts were revived and mainstreamed for political mobilisation and to delineate the Hindu ethnic identity of India. South Asian states lack ethno-cultural homogeneity, which affects their mass mobilisation and unification³. Hence, the Indian nationalists attempted to discover linkages through Hindu revivalism to construct a homogeneous society that imposed subordination on 'others' who did not belong to this categorisation. 'By avoiding reference to Muslims, these nationalist thinkers seemed to have clearly identified the constituents of the proposed nation'⁴. When attempts were made to diminish the fundamentals of Islamic identity, Muslim revivalism evolved as a reaction to it. Tilak belonged to the socio-politically active Chitpavan Brahmin community of Maharashtra and was induced by

these developments. On glorification of Hindu identity and antagonisation of Islamic beliefs, Mujahid writes:

On the religious plane, it was represented by the most virulent, fundamentalist, and missionary movement of the Arya Samaj, launched by Dayananda Saraswati (1827-83) in 1875; on the cultural plane by the Hindu Mela (Calcutta, 1867-70) which gave birth to the Bharata Varta National Society (f. 1870), the Gaurakshini (cow-protection) Sabhas (f. 1883), Hindi Shitya Sammelan (1870s), and Nagari Pracharni Sabha (1893)...⁵

Tilak gave a political dimension to these developments. He sought to revive the glory of the Marathas and the valour of Shivaji to establish *Hindu Pad Padshahi* ⁶. The public celebration of the Shivaji festival and Ganesh festival was organised more to develop an anti-muslim environment than for spiritual assimilations⁷.

The idea of India as a nation-state between 1850-1880 was carved out of the social, cultural, and religious traits of Hindus and Hinduism, which attempted to develop an artificial homogeneity with selective inclusion or exclusion of past memoirs and cultural ingredients in a naturally heterogeneous subcontinent. The national awakening in nineteenth-century India is usually termed as a renaissance or revival. But beyond this, a consciousness of belonging to a nation was born.⁸ Through Tilak, these embryonic socio-cultural ideas became politically mature.

Tilak was not a political philosopher in the true sense. He did not develop a vision for a politically ideal society. He does not discuss the best state, such as Plato and Aristotle, nor a perfect state, such as Hegel and Bosanquet⁹. He constantly shifted his stand on what represents India and lacked consistency in his ideas. His thoughts underwent paradigm shifts over the decades. His nationalist thoughts must be examined in three major timelines to understand them, from 1875 to 1890, 1891 to 1907, and 1914 to 1920.

Between 1875 and 1890, Tilak's political activism was restricted to re-establish Maharashtra's Brahminic socio-political and economic hegemony. He was an ardent defender of caste-based divisions, patriarchy, and other social prejudices. Tilak maintained a conservative stand when he opposed the Age of Consent Bill for women's empowerment¹⁰. In *Kesari* and *Maratha*, he criticised Malabari and other social reformers over the Age of Consent Bill by quoting Shastras¹¹. His notion of nationalism was tantamount to the polity administered under the Brahminical code. Because of his detrimental thoughts, his aura remained limited to Maharashtra during this phase. Even within

Maharashtra, educated Brahmins and Dalit-Bahujan reformers challenged his assertions.

Between 1890 and 1907, Tilak minimised his campaign for Brahminical ascendancy, relatively diminished his social conservatism, and began to campaign for social equality among Hindus. He advocated political liberalism and national fraternity among Hindus. From Brahminical hegemony, he proceeded to Hindu cultural nationalism. During the last phase, from 1914 till his death in 1920, Tilak freed himself from social prejudices and discriminatory beliefs. From a leader of conservatives and extremists, he became a secular-democratic leader. He modified his definition of Swaraj from complete independence to home rule. He relinquished the anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Culture as the Element of National Identity

Tilak endorsed the Indo-Aryan culture to proclaim the ethnic identity of Hindus for social assimilation, which was necessary to articulate a movement for political autonomy. His nationalism had a revivalist orientation influenced by the Indian Renaissance of the nineteenth century. While he actively defended the continuation of traditions, he sometimes criticised them as dogmas. The former act glorifies traditions as emblems of identity and pride. The latter aimed to promote rationalism in India in a European way. 'The historical cultural discoveries of the early orientalist, ... regarding the Aryan myth, the Sanskrit language, and the sacred texts, laid the foundation for all subsequent cultural, nationalist articulations in the subcontinent'¹².

Initially, Tilak endorsed casteist jingoism in the name of Marathi nationalism and asserted that re-establishing Brahminic order should be the ultimate objective of the national movement. He asked Brahmins to forget the notion of equality of mankind and to pursue their self-interest¹³. To him, meticulous adherence to the medieval Hindu order is the message of nationalism, and any other form of body politic and social reforms would be detrimental to the progress and culture of India. In his thoughts, caste was a non-negotiable factor.

In the nineteenth century, the social services of Christian missionaries, British-backed social reforms, the rise of Dalit-Bahujan activism, and the spread of English education had improved the status of lower castes and other weaker sections of society. They exposed the social and economic disabilities imposed by the caste hierarchy and religious orthodoxy. Anti-Brahminic movements flourished under the leadership of reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Narayan Guru, Ghasi Das, Iyothee Dass, and others. Initially, the high-caste elites used British imperialism to strengthen their dominance over the marginalised communities. Eventually, this dominance was challenged by subaltern

Dalit intellectuals like Phule and Ambedkar¹⁴. 'Refusal to perform the customary slave labour, aspirations and attempts to diversify occupation and particularly to escape the ascriptive status became endemic among the lower castes, signalling the advent of the new era'¹⁵. By challenging the traditional obligations, bonded labour, agrestic slaves, peasants, and attached menial workers were demonstrating that the times had changed¹⁶. The religious renaissance in India became a reason behind the renewed strength of Hindu orthodoxy in the nineteenth century¹⁷.

Fearing the fall of the conventional set-up of society, Tilak opposed the admission of Mahar and Mang children in schools as they were 'socially marginalised'. He opposed the academic demand made by reformers to simplify Sanskrit and Mathematics papers for Matriculation and Bachelor of Arts (B.A). This approach was directed to maximise the scope of students from non-literate backgrounds and lower castes in higher education. To restrict the reach of such students, in 1881, Tilak asked Bombay University to convert the three-year degree courses into four-year degree courses¹⁸. Though he condemned the practice of untouchability in public, he 'did not sign a memorandum to remove untouchability and thereby disappointed the organizers of a conference of the Depressed Classes'¹⁹.

He also opposed girls' education by claiming that learning English would make women and girls lose their nationality. This kind of education would make them immoral and insubordinate, destroying their traditional values²⁰. He had to fight on two fronts: firstly, against Hindu reformers, many of whom were educated Brahmins, and secondly, against the British for 'interfering' in the internal matters of Hindus. The British policies were shifting the flow of social capital from *savarnas*²¹ towards *avarnas*²².

In 1853 the patronage system of employment was abolished. In 1854 Wood's despatch revealed the fact that education was not percolating and emphasized the need for mass education. In 1861 the new criminal law, based on the principle of rule of law replaced the Varna-based Gentoo Code of 1776, thus ending Brahminic pre-eminence in judicial matters. In 1870 the government decided to give priority to vernacular education. In 1872 Hunter stressed the need for Muslim education. Tired of waiting for upper caste candidates, in the post-Mutiny period missionaries turned their attention to the education and upliftment of the lower castes²³.

Tilak's nationalism was a movement to retain the social status quo, preserve feudalism, annihilate the changing power relations within the society, and halt the progressive measures that aimed to improve the conditions of the subalterns.

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Till 1900, the activism that engulfed Bengal and Maharashtra, constituted micro-nationalism, aspiring for regional autonomy. Thereafter, they started to unite for macro-nationalism, that is Indian Nationalism. The former were natural identities, while the latter was a 'construct'. The former has variables such as cultural homogeneity, common language, and shared history. The latter has variables such as sovereignty, common citizenship, and a uniform administrative and legal system²⁴. Tilak played an essential role in uniting these sub-nationalist movements. His activism also inspired Bengali revolutionaries, and he seemed to have been in touch with Sri Aurobindo, who was secretly organising revolutionary activities²⁵.

Tilak joined the Indian National Congress, which eulogised Vedantic idealism, to further the interests of the Brahmin class, as it was initially viewed as the organisation of the upper strata of Hindu society. The stake of the class was the preservation of the old order²⁶. 'The pervasive and persistent theme of their socio-cultural world-view is that of going back to tradition, which in the context meant social slavery for the lower caste masses'²⁷.

'Another contention of Tilak was reviving the prevalent feudal order during Peshwa's rule. Peshwas were Chitpavan Brahmins who reinforced *Varnashram dharma*²⁸. In 'Maharashtra the moneylenders happened to be *Chitpavans* in many cases and *Kunbis* were changing into hired labourers working on their own fields'²⁹. With the fall of Peshwas in 1818, the social structure began to change rapidly. Lower castes and peasants started to challenge casteism and feudalism. During 1876-78, in the Deccan Revolt, the peasants attacked moneylenders, many of whom were Brahmins. Tilak opposed the revolt, stating that only true nationalists uphold *varnashram dharma* and that caste alone is the basis of the Hindu nation. When the British government enacted the Deccan Agriculturist Relief Act in 1879, which exempted the attachment of the tools and lands of peasants in case of debt and abolished imprisonment for non-payment of debt, Tilak started to oppose the act. He declared that moneylenders are like gods to peasants. He resisted the act and asked them not to lend money to peasants³⁰. When Ranade and Wedderburn put forth the proposal to establish an Agricultural Bank to provide loans to peasants at a lower rate of interest as moneylenders were charging heavy interest on loans, Tilak, to protect the interests of moneylenders, criticised and opposed the proposal. Due to his rigorous resistance, the proposal for the Bank failed. He blamed Ranade for betraying caste interests and dividing the Chitpavan community³¹. Tilak did not find the caste system inconsistent with the process of modernisation. He justified its continuation by comparing it to the European system

of guilds and considered it essential to prevent the alienation of individuals³².

After 1891, Tilak transformed his contentions from regional Brahminic nationalism to Pan-Indian Hindu cultural nationalism. His definition of national culture and cultural nationalism was restricted to Hindus, Hinduism, Hindu culture, and Hindi language. From casteist sentimentalism, he moved towards a religious nationalism with a realist approach.

For cultural nationalist thinkers like Aurobindo, India is the incarnation of the goddess *Kali*. His philosophy constituted metaphysical abstractions. But, in Tilak's nationalism, there was admiration for Shivaji, Nana Fadnavis, and the Ganesh festival. Bengali nationalism represented emotionalism and imagination, while in Maharashtra, common sense and pragmatism dominated³³. Tilak viewed Nationalism as a religion of the public. The influence of Rousseau's Civic religion on Tilak is visible here. Rousseau 'envisioned a religion of sociability, a religion of the citizen, whose contents were not the dogmas of traditional religions, but rather the sentiments of sociability that all citizens should have'³⁴.

After his release in 1914, Tilak propounded pluralistic, multireligious, and civic nationalism in his teachings. Despite calling Gokhale his political guru, Gandhi developed his mass movement on the foundation laid by Tilak³⁵. Tilak once visited the house of a 'lower caste person' during the Ganesh procession to show his disagreement with untouchability. In 1918, while addressing a special conference for the untouchables in Bombay, he said, 'If God were to tolerate untouchability, I would not recognise him as God at all...'³⁶.

Tilak also changed his contestation about India's proletariat class of peasants and farmers. Earlier, he had opposed reforms such as the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act of 1879 and the Agricultural Bank. Tilak started supporting socialist thoughts and upheld the rights of the peasants. In 1896, during the famine-like condition in Deccan due to a failed monsoon, Tilak pressurised the government to grant remission or suspend land revenue assessment because of crop failure. He said that those who cannot pay should not pay the assessment. Tilak was seen moving to the left during the last years of his life³⁷. He supported the railway strike of 638 members in 1899, supported the postal peon strike for higher wages, and addressed many labour rallies between 1907 and 1908. When he was exiled to Mandalay in 1908, Bombay city was paralysed as 85 mills remained shut for six days as workers joined *hartal* (the action of suspending work). On 23 July 1908, around one lakh workers joined the strike, challenging his conviction³⁸. Tilak was the first Indian leader to present Karl Marx

and his conception of class conflict to India³⁹. 'Tilak had a genuine interest in socialist thought', the articles he wrote supporting the cause of agricultural labourers and industrial workers in the *Kesari* proves the argument.⁴⁰

Muslims and Tilak's Nationalism

Initially, Tilak retained an anti-Muslim tirade to fuel his ethnonationalism. Dwelling in the legacy of the *Hindavi swarajya*⁴¹ of Marathas, he painted Muslims as the enemy of India and an immediate danger to national identity. Between 1890 to 1900 there were multiple communal riots in Maharashtra. Tilak and his associates' names were frequently reported as perpetrators. He asserted that Muslims were aggressors, fanatics, and jealous of the Hindus. Hindus were vulnerable in front of them as the British system deliberately acted in their favour. Tilak often cited the Rigvedic passage *ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti* which means that the ultimate truth (God) is one, though understood differently by individuals. However, in practice, he advocated sectarianism⁴².

In 1893, there were communal clashes in Bombay. Tilak, in *Mahratta*, attacked Muslims assembling at Jumma Masjid as the cause of riots. He wrote in *Mahratta*, 'The Jumma Masjid holds nearly 6000 people and it is highly dangerous that 6000 roughs should be allowed to assemble there... under the ostensible purpose of worshipping without any notice to the police'⁴³. He asked Hindus to counterattack not only for self-defence but to teach a lesson to Mahomedans.

On 18 September 1893, there were riots in Yeola. The Patel Mosque and Muralidhar temple were vandalised. Tilak blamed the Muslims of Yeola and their aggression for communal tensions:

The first serious communal riot to which we need to refer occurred in Bombay in 1893. Tilak at that time was on the warpath. He had not yet revived the Ganapati festival which later did so much to inflame communal feelings, but his speeches had already taken on an anti-Muslim tone and the tension between the two communities was growing⁴⁴.

The Mamlatdar, looking into the matter, claimed that certain Hindus attacked both of these religious places. In response, Tilak blamed the British administration and moderates for hiding the aggressive acts of Muslims. 'N.C. Kelkar, an associate of Tilak... notes in his biography that the Ganapati festival was proposed as a means to consolidate the Hindu community in a private talk with Tilak and M.B. Namjoshi shortly after the communal riots of 1893'⁴⁵. When the district administration invited 12 representatives of both communities

and concluded the compromise between them for peace and harmony in Yeola, Tilak saw the compromise as one-sided. He opposed the ruling of the administration, which asked Hindus to stop the music in front of the mosque during processions. He asserted that the Hindu nation has nothing to do with Mohammedans and asked Hindus to boycott them socially⁴⁶.

Before 1890, Hindus would participate in Muslims' processions. However, between 1890 and 1900, the communal divide widened, the Ganapati festival became highly popular, communal riots increased, and Hindu participation in Muslim festivals decreased. It was believed that Tilak provided perspiration and publicity to the Ganesh festival⁴⁷. Tilak often stated that the occasion of Shivaji killing Afzal Khan is something every Hindu must rejoice. Such articulations widened the chasm between Hindus and Muslims. In Pune, the Ganesh festival was politicised:

The proximity of the riots to the Ganapati utsava injected fervour into the desire to organize Hindus to celebrate their festival on a grand scale. Tilak wrote about the public festival, giving his full support to the celebrations as a vehicle to consolidate indigenous, or perhaps more appropriately Hindu, political consciousness⁴⁸.

After 1914, Tilak engaged in a secular approach when 'he became involved with processes of expediting Hindu-Muslim understanding in the twentieth century'⁴⁹. He supported communal representation for Muslims as minorities and the Khilafat movement. The Lucknow Pact of 1916 between Congress and the Muslim League was successful due to his efforts. Ansari argued that Tilak's position during the Lucknow Pact was 'notable for liberality and large-mindedness towards the Muslims'⁵⁰.

Regarding Muslims, he held that irrespective of religious and linguistic differences, the inner man is the same⁵¹ and they are as Indians as Hindus. This is why many Muslim leaders like M. A. Jinnah and M. A. Ansari stood by his side. Shaukat Ali said, 'I would like to mention again for the hundredth time that both Mahomed Ali and myself belonged and still belong to Lokamanya Tilak's political party'⁵². Hasarat Mohani claimed, 'I even at that early age, chose the Lokamanya as the ideal Leader for me...'⁵³. Hasan Imam called Tilak his father in Indian politics⁵⁴. In 1917, there were communal riots in the Arrah region of Bihar. M.K. Gandhi and Tilak recognised the miseries faced by Muslims in the region and blamed the Hindu mob for the excess. Other Congressmen neither recognised the incident nor condemned it⁵⁵.

In the Sedition Committee Report of 1918, it was mentioned that the Ganesh festival was not intended to be anti-Muslim. The District Superintendent of Police of Nasik, in his report on the Ganapati Procession of 3 September 1895, claimed that many 'Musalmans attended the procession, and... most musicians of the many bands accompanying the procession were Musalmans'⁵⁶.

Tilak's articulations changed because, after 1914, he started losing popularity. The public interest in Ganesh and Shivaji festivals had died out, and the *Kesari* and *Mahratta* were in their fragile phase⁵⁷. He also changed the symbolic meaning of Shivaji. In his article *Is Shivaji a National Hero*, he held that it is 'not the alien or the foreign character of Mughal state that is projected as reasons for Shivaji's resistance, but its degeneration into tyranny and oppression'⁵⁸.

Hinduism as the Element of National Identity

Colonial scholars described colonies as backward societies incapable of changing the social dynamics necessary to transform them into industrial nations. Therefore, nationalists aimed to overcome these numerous social attachments and build the nation as the only legitimate institution of political loyalty⁵⁹. Tilak viewed Hinduism as the moral force for the national regeneration of India. Early glimpses of *Hindudesh*⁶⁰ philosophy can be traced in his thoughts. Rather than accepting the Western narrative of Hinduism as a set of unorganised ways of life, he attempted to develop political Hinduism as an organised civic religion. The Western narrative had oversimplified Hinduism, broke its cadaver, restricted it to a personal affair of conscience, and forbade it from developing a political consciousness among natives. He believed that unless various sects within the Hindu fold unite and develop social cohesion, national imagination will not materialise.

Various Dharma Sabhas (Divine Societies) for the cause of Sanatan dharma and to oppose missionary and reform activities sprang up in India in 1831 when the first Dharma Sabha was founded in Calcutta. A pan-Hindu organisation Bharat Dharma Mahamandal was founded by Pandit Deendayalu Sharma⁶¹. The main objectives of the Mahamandala were to propagate Hinduism based on sacred texts and varnashrama dharma, to unite various Hindu sects, to establish educational institutions and libraries for the preservation and teaching of Sanskrit texts, and to promote Hindi as the language for education and administration⁶². Though this body succeeded to some extent in uniting various Hindu Sabhas, it lacked a strong political methodology. Inspired by these *savarna*-centric institutions, Tilak developed his idea of India based on Hinduism.

He asserted that all sects are different branches of the same Sanatan dharma. It is the religion of Aryans and is as ancient as human history. Such rhetoric was necessary to 'construct' the racial-ethnic identity of the Hindu nation. Hindus cannot hope to rise as a nation without brotherhood and pan-India consciousness. He used religious revivalism tactics for political mobilisation of the masses. However, after 1914, he became a staunch supporter of the polyethnic secular nationalism pioneered by liberal ideals. He started to use Hinduism more to provide an ethnic identity to India than as a religious identity and surrendered his efforts to construct a theocratic nation.

Tilak's project of Hindu nation intended to popularise the religious identity and connect it with body politic. For this, he relied on historical myths and extremist means of political activism. Exploring the notion of a Hindu nation, Tilak observed:

Hindu religion as such provides for a moral as well as social tie. This being our definition we must go back to the past and see how it was worked out. During Vedic times India was a self-contained country. It was united as a great nation. That unity has disappeared bringing on us great degradation, and it becomes the duty of the leaders to revive that union⁶³.

He argued for homogenisation and wanted Hindus to forget minor differences which exist between them in the form of sects to emerge as a mighty Hindu nation⁶⁴. His thought carried a racial canopy necessary for stronger homogenisation, centralisation, and ethnicisation. 'Some important writings of Tilak such as *The Orion*,... *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita Rahasya*,... *Vedic Chronology and Vedanta Jyotish*, were specifically meant to constitute a kind of legitimacy and authenticity for the antiquity of India'⁶⁵. Tilak in his works *Orion* and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, 'proved that the antiquity of the Vedas goes back nearly 5,000 years B.C. and that the original Aryan race came from the North Polar regions which were at one time habitable'⁶⁶. As per the Rigvedic verse VIII. 46. 28, dog was a pet domestic animal used as a beast of burden, similar to its use in the polar region⁶⁷. Tilak synthesised archaic primordialism with politicised devotionalism⁶⁸. Hindu nation as a primordial idea evolved in conjunction with the nation's evolutionary, physiological, and metaphysical notions. Aryanism, an element of national antiquity, was the synthesis influenced by British and German orientalism and social elitism⁶⁹. Since the eighteenth century, in the context of the construction of the antiquity of the nation which was known by various names like Aryan, Indo-Aryan, Hindu etcetera came to be identified with the

Sanskritic/Vedic Brahminism. Indo-Aryans, who were a branch of Nordic races of the Northern Hemisphere, were considered to have brought 'civilization' to this land⁷⁰.

Like Vivekananda and Gandhi, Tilak emphasised how Indian civilisation is different and superior to the West. Western societies are materialistic, individualist (negatively), and non-spiritualist, whereas Hindu civilisation is spiritual, cultural, and collectivist. Tilak used revivalism and public celebration of Hindu religious practices i.e., Ganesh festival, to rationalise and materialise religious nationalism. He demeaned Muslims and their festivals, like Muharram, to strengthen Hinduism against Abrahamic faiths. He cited *Dharmashastras*⁷¹ to legitimise Hindu India and insisted on abiding by Vedic ideals and behavioural codes as represented in the texts. The intention was to redefine Hindu civilisation in the political context. The *Advaita vedanta*⁷² shaped his philosophy of national and individual liberty.

There is no agreement on the status of Tilak as a chauvinist Hindutva nationalist or a secular extremist. To a certain extent, the allegation can be said to be flawed on two grounds. Firstly, Tilak advocated Hindu nationalism and not Hindutva. There was no binary opposition between Gandhi and Tilak compared to Savarkar and Golw(a)lakar, or Jinnah and Maulana Mawadadi. In fact the emergence of democratic, secular... nation of modern India had its roots in Lokmanya Tilak's political ideology...⁷³. Secondly, Tilak's intention behind popularising the Bhagavad Gita in the political domain was not to communalise the nation-making movement but to rationalise political activism and preach Karma-yoga⁷⁴. His commentary *Gitarahasya*, which he wrote during his years in Mandalay Jail, was detached from his communal and Brahminic temperament.

Tilak utilised the Bhagavad Gita because it was one of the sacred texts common to different sects of Hinduism. This would have helped him in pursuing communal unity among Hindus. The 'nationalists used many devices for mass mobilization. (T)he preaching of *Bhagwat Gita* was one such method, which the officials considered as causing greater mischief than even the more reckless extremist newspapers⁷⁵. Since activism had to take centre stage against passivism, Tilak blamed some earlier interpreters of the Gita and faiths, such as Buddhism and Jainism, for preaching passivism and renunciation to Indians beyond the limits of worldly life⁷⁶.

There was a paradigm shift in Tilak's thoughts after 1914. There was a steady decline in his communal tone, and from a communal nationalist, he re-surfaced as a secular nationalist. From Brahminical supremacy, he had moved towards liberal humanism. 'The man who

once wanted to prosecute G. G. Agarkar simply for writing that he (Tilak) took tea at the hands of a Portuguese waiter, was now openly taking tea prepared by a Muslim and served by a Muslim⁷⁷. He was also involved in Hindu-Muslim amity⁷⁸. Some believe that Tilak was never an anti-Muslim inciter because of which educated Muslims supported him. When he was arrested in 1897 for writing seditious articles, his friends in Calcutta collected Rs. 16, 000 for his defence, of which Rs. 7000 were donated by a Muslim business firm of Hajee Ahmed & Hajee Hossain Hajee Abdal. The correspondence message from the firm was very emotional. 'The moment the Government arrested him, Mr. Tilak ceased to be a leader of the Hindu community. He is now above all castes, creeds, and religions. He is going to be prosecuted for his fight for India, the common motherland of the Muslims and Hindus'⁷⁹.

Tilak, after his release from Mandalay, had turned into a physically and emotionally weak man. After spending six long years in jail, Tilak preferred not to raise any volatile issue that could get him imprisoned again. Most cultural nationalists who worked with him earlier were either side-lined by the dominant moderate section of the Congress, while others like Aurobindo had voluntarily left political activism. At this time, Gandhi was emerging in Indian politics, who introduced a non-violent methodology of resistance. With his new approach to the freedom struggle, he achieved the support of the Congress members. Besides these, Tilak had other reasons to go mild on his Hindu nationalism. The Select Bureaucratic team headed by Lawrence Robertson, in its confidential noting, had mentioned the following challenges that would make it difficult for Tilak to regain his position: i) The perilous state of his financial conditions; ii) Imprisonment of six long years kept him ignorant about recent developments and popular feelings; iii) The popular movement that he had built over the past 20 years collapsed from its roots; iv) His newspapers *Kesari* and *Mahratta* lost their extremist competence due to the Press Act of 1910, and the Ganapati festival was not as politically popular as before⁸⁰.

The episodes of communal riots after 1890 started to decrease by the end of the century. The communal nature of the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals was replaced by the anti-British theme, and with new vigour, Hindus started participating in Muslim festivals. A few months before his death in 1920, Tilak replied to Paranjapye (the Principal of Fergusson College), who accused him of being a social reactionary, that the intention behind Shivaji and Ganesh festivals was not to strengthen orthodox prejudices but to retain pride in the traditions created by our ancestors. A change must be evolutionary and not

socially revolutionary. Similar movements were inaugurated in Scotland and Ireland for similar nationalist purposes⁸¹. He claimed that the Ganesh festival aimed at developing a sense of belonging among the people.⁸²

Language as the Element of National Identity

Tilak's observations on language can be analysed on the basis of his speech delivered at Banaras at the Nagari Pracharni Sabha Conference in December 1905. Tilak emphasised on developing a common language for the whole of India⁸³. He recognized the presence of linguistic diversity and the absence of a common language of communication in India as an obstacle to the development of national identity and solidarity. For him, no force was more powerful than a common language for national unity⁸⁴. He was in favour of bringing together the different linguistic elements of India under a common language. He advocated common characters or scripts for Indian languages.

It seems that Tilak was bothered about the absence of linguistic unity in the country to overcome the problem of political colonialism. His prescriptions regarding the linguistic diversity and its inherent problems are more context-specific in the sense that post-colonial India has overcome the problems of linguistic diversity not by practicing uniformity but by celebrating diversity in the form of recognition of different languages and scripts. Various political streams in post-independent India, from right to left and from left to the centre, have recognized the strength of linguistic diversity for socio-political harmony. To add to this development, modern science, and technology have come as great facilitators in practicing linguistic diversity in the country.

The rumination on Tilak's ideas on nation and nationalism forces some comparison between the other votaries of nationalist struggle and thought process. In this regard, comparing Tilak with M.K. Gandhi would help in understanding the epistemology of nationalist thought. The reason for comparing Tilak with Gandhi is the similarity in their mass experiments and the difference in the realisation of ideas. Gandhi entered Indian politics informally in 1915, a few months after Tilak's release from Mandalay jail. There were conformity and contradictions in the thoughts of these leaders of the masses. They both believed in the spirit of swaraj, which was beyond mere freedom from colonisation, and recognised the role of the masses in the struggle against oppressors. Gandhi, to some extent, can be regarded as the successor to Tilak in Indian politics as he developed his method of mass movements on the foundation led by Tilak⁸⁵. Like Tilak, he emphasised the principles

of *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, boycott, and national education⁸⁶. One of Gandhi's biggest contributions to the national movement lies in his efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims, Western and Eastern wisdom, Moderates and Extremists, politics, spirituality, or religion.

Still, there were paradoxes in values and ideological commitments, which were evident in both of their thoughts. Though Tilak did not outrightly propound militancy and terrorism, he genuinely believed that violence in some form would be necessary to attain *swaraj*. Gandhi advocated the supremacy of means over ends and condemned violence in every form. He declared G. K. Gokhale, the leader of the moderate faction of Congress, as his political teacher or *guru*. Though both used the Bhagavad Gita in the context of a national movement, they ended up at different conclusions. Gandhi believed that Gita preached the message of detachment and selfless performance in one's duties. To him, the preachings of Gita are inconsistent with acts of violence⁸⁷. Tilak preached *Karma-yoga* (life of activism) in *Gita Rahasya*, his commentary on Bhagavad Gita. Though an outer reading may make his views appear unobjectionable, he interpreted it to rationalise political activism and consequent violence. He asserted that, like Krishna sought Arjuna to fight against unjust Kauravas, Hindus should fight against the British by violence if needed to attain *swaraj*⁸⁸. In 1897, during his speech in Pune, Krishna asserted that, as Krishna mentions in Gita, no blame attaches to a person if he performs his duty without any attachment to the fruit of his deeds. He further added that people should think beyond the Penal Code and commit to the extreme atmosphere of performing necessary actions⁸⁹. Gandhi was sceptical of Tilak's attitude on certain matters. He believed that for Tilak, the nation is the only identity. Hence, according to Gandhi, Tilak did not believe in God as he had no faith in truth and non-violence⁹⁰.

In the pre-Gandhian era, the politics of nationalism was heavily influenced by provincialism, with Maharashtra and Bengal being its hotspots. Gandhi gave the movement a true pan-Indian scope by shifting its hub to the Hindi belt as well as taking a movement to rural corners of India. His saintly (*sanyasi*) appearance convinced rural-backward Indians to relate themselves with the emerging nations, as Gandhi was able to define his leadership as non-elitist. While Tilak's Hindu nationalism promoted militancy, distrust, and religious sectarianism, Gandhi's Hind Swaraj attempted to spiritualise nationalism by bridging the gap between Hindus and Muslims. Tilak eulogised Shivaji as a 'Hindu' king, simultaneously demonising Islamic rule and kings. On the other hand, Gandhi saw Islamic rule in India as an integral part of Indian history. He believed that though Muslim

rulers invaded India as aliens and barbarians, over time, they adopted Indic values of peaceful existence and treated this country as their home. Hindus and Muslims largely lived a peaceful life during the reign of the Mughals. He adored Akbar as the greatest tolerant king and asserted that the British drew a false image of Aurangzeb as a fanatic anti-Hindu ruler⁹¹.

Before Gandhi, militancy and the cult of violence had given the wilderness to national identity. Such wilderness would have been eccentric to any contemporary humanistic society. Gandhi's entry into politics weakened the celebration of violence in the name of national pride as he shifted the focus from violence to self-sacrifice. He was critical of Tilak and Mrs. Annie Besant for driving youth towards anarchy and violence⁹². He tamed and domesticated the force of nationalism and shifted its focus from the masculine urge to protect and control land to the spiritual urge to revere collective good and the spiritualisation of politics. From nationalism as politics for power in the pre-Gandhian era, in Gandhian thought, nationalism emerged as a social philosophy of general will and *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all). While Hindu nationalists like Tilak viewed the cow as a symbol of Hindu nationhood and demanded a ban on its killing, Gandhi recognised the cow protection more in the form of compassion towards living creatures and a symbol of *ahimsa* or non-violence. Followers of Tilak viewed Gandhi's emphasis on *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* as a weapon against British imperialism as a purely utopian tactic. In the mid-1930s, Savarkar emerged as a staunch supporter of violence and a major opponent of Gandhian pacifism. Godse, the assassin of Gandhi, stated that Tilak and Savarkar held identical views⁹³.

Conclusion

Tilak remained one of the most controversial and popular leaders of his time. Scholars appreciate his role in popularising the self-determination movement by pushing it beyond the walls of Congress. As a pragmatist, he repeatedly modified his definition of what represents India. From caste aspirations and conservatism, one can see him shifting to civic nationalism, political liberalism, and universal egalitarianism among the nations. He provided a cultural identity to the national movement. Though his political and life journey ended in 1920, his legacy and works were continued by his successors despite them following diverse approaches to politics and freedom struggle.

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