

A Comparative Discussion of the Spirit of Nationalism in the Religious Philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Bal Gangadhar Tilak with Relevance to Modern India

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda and Bal Gangadhar Tilak tried to re-interpret a few ancient ideals derived mainly from the Upanishads and nevertheless, we see, in their philosophies, some new conceptions and rational explanations and the same other attempts in construction. From this approach, they may, thus, be regarded to be both interpretative and creative.

In accordance with Vivekananda, religion is a necessity of life. From the general eye view, those things merely are regarded as necessary for life which can satisfy the daily and the external needs of life. Food, clothing, shelter etc. are examples of what can be called naturalistic or physical requirements. But, these are not only the requirements of life. Man can't remain satisfied with these physical needs alone. Rather man craves for something higher – something better even in the midst of comfort and luxury. Vivekananda names this craving of man as his religious craving without which man can't live.

Almost in the similar voice, Bal Gangadhar Tilak says that an underlying unity exists between God, man and the world. Tilak accepts the world as an existent, as God wills it so. Man has been striving to attain union with God. He must also require unity with the world and perform for it accordingly. Otherwise the unity will not be perfect. Like Vivekananda, Tilak asserts that religion is nothing but to serve the poor, needy, greedy, hungry, down-trodden people. Again, he says that service to man is service to God, i.e., to serve the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the greedy, the hungry, the down-trodden is to serve God. Therefore, there seems very much affinity between Vivekananda and Tilak. Of course, Tilak was not in favour of asceticism as he rejects renunciation of the worldly life after attaining the ultimate goal.

Keywords: Ancient ideals, Naturalistic requirements, Physical requirements, Rational explanation, Religious cravings, Worldly life, Ultimate goal.

Introduction:

In accordance with Vivekananda, a very essential characteristic of religion is that it necessarily possesses a super natural content. This element of super-naturality yields to it a uniqueness and distinguishes it from all other forms of intellectual discipline. What's the nature of the super natural content? In this respect, it may be put that there is possibility of a personal God or the Absolute or a supernatural Law or

anything of this kind. Such element possesses the possibility of being the object of religious aspirations and hence reveals the very core of what is called religion in real sense of the term.

On the other hand, B.G.Tilak was the first nationalist leader who sought close contact with the masses and in this regard, he was a forerunner of Vivekananda. He always talked about India and not of international issues like Vivekananda. Vivekananda talked about the world religious perspective. Also, he talked about the concept of universal religion by way of which he wanted to establish a worldwide understanding and brotherhood. Tilak devoted all his capabilities in respect of attaining freedom from the British rule. He laid the foundation of India's freedom by his extreme dedication without which we could not have received the freedom in the true sense of the term. While Vivekananda can be named to be the true spiritual figure of India, Lokamanya Tilak is the father of Indian nationalism.

A Comparative Discussion of the Spirit of Nationalism in the Religious Philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Bal Gangadhar Tilak with Relevance to Modern India:

Vivekananda puts, "of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of the human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion".¹ He explains that conflicts are merely apparent, and that they don't affect the essence of religion. Really speaking, Vivekananda accepts that sects and conflicts have to be there. If each and everyone get accustomed with thinking the same thought, there remains actually nothing to be thought. "It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought...whirls and eddies occur only in rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water".² Change or variation is the sign of life, it must be there.

Here, questions arise, "How can all these varieties be true? How can opposite opinions be true at the same time? The answer to these questions includes the very possibility of a universal religion. Vivekananda asserts that a universal religion, if really universal, must satisfy at least two conditions; first, it must open its gates to every individual, it must admit that nobody is born with this or that religion; whether he takes to one religion or the other must ultimately be left to his inner likes and choices. From this point of view, we, by individualizing religion, really universalize it. Secondly, a really universal religion must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect. After all, the universal religion has to supersede the conflicts of these sects, and therefore, must appear satisfying and reasonable to them all. It is reflected that variety is inevitable, that the different thoughts and approaches should be there. So, to be an ideal religion – a really universal religion, it must be broad and large enough to supply food to all these minds.

Vivekananda emphasized that the concept of universal religion already exists. Like the universal brotherhood already there in is not noticed by some men, so, universal religion is there although some of us are not aware of it. Naturally questions arise – What is the true nature of the universal religion? Does it apprehend the common elements of all religions? Has it succeeded in discovering some such aspects of religion that would give comfort to everyone? In response to these questions, Vivekananda puts that this is difficult-almost an impossible task. Because various religions assert various qualities of religion and as such, it is not possible to find out the common elements. As for example, Islam gives stress on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification for entering into the kingdom of God. It is not an easy task to make a comparison among them, and therefore, the doctrine of universal religion would not be the common character of different religions. Vivekananda asserts that the universal religion is not religion that will have one universal philosophy, or one universal mythology or one universal ritual. They may all differ from sect to sect or even from individual to individual, and yet the universal religion is there.

According to Vivekananda, the universal religion should be acceptable to all minds. The largest possible proportion of mankind has to be satisfied, and therefore, it must be able to supply food to all the different types of mind. Hence, to Vivekananda, the ideal religion must harmoniously balance all the aspects of religion viz., philosophy, emotion, work and mysticism. "And this religion is attained by what we, in India, call Yoga-union. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity, to the mystic, between his lower and Higher self, to the lover, union between himself and the God of love, and to the Philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga"³. The target of yoga is union, realization of oneness. In this respect, Vivekananda puts, "Religion is realization, not talk nor doctrine, nor theories....It is being and becoming not hearing or acknowledging, it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes"⁴.

Vivekananda was in favour of the open religion based on the spiritual texts of the Vedas and the Upanishads. He accepted religion as a matter of experience and not a system of dogmas. Vivekananda intended to break all barriers among religions and remove all conflicts and oppositions. He expressed that religion must be limitless and Infinite like God. For Vivekananda, it was the same Brahman that manifested in various forms and powers. He revealed, "May he who is the Brahman of Hindus, the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in heaven of the Christians, give strength to you. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his law of growth"⁵. Fanaticism, priest-craft, and exclusive tendencies in religions were vehemently criticized by Vivekananda. He says that all religions are true and they all lead to the realization of God. He never wanted that a religion should grow by defeating other religions. He welcomed diversity in religions which expresses spiritual awakening and evolution in humanity.

Tilak, on the other hand, established his tendencies of nationalism through religious standpoint. He felt more strongly that for the strength of any nation and the success of any nationalist movement, the country people must have a strong activist approach. That is why Tilak wrote the secret of the 'Bhagavad Gita' (Gita Rahasya) where he wanted to prove that without the path of action, salvation is not possible. Tilak had moulded his entire life on the basis of the teaching of the 'Gita'. The 'Bhagavad Gita' explains that 'karma' (action) comprises all types of action which a man performs, no matter where these actions are bodily (kayika) or vocal (vacika) or mental (manasika). Tilak emphasized on the Gita's concept of 'Karma Yoga' and made attempt to apply the same for the development of humanity as a whole. He says that there is no exposition which is so scientific as the 'Karma Yoga' of the Gita. Vivekananda advocates function of right action through 'jnana' (knowledge) so as to realize the real nature of one's Self. In this way, Vivekananda was very much influenced by the Bhagavad Gita as well as the Vedanta.

Tilak was using 'Karma' as an instrument for the achievement of 'Swarajya'. He, as a political philosopher, has put forward to us a theory of nationalism. His theory of nationalism was a synthesis of the Vedantic ideal of the spirit as supreme freedom and the western concept of Mazzini, Burke, J. S. Mill and later on Wilson. In 1919, and 1920, he accepted the Wilsonian concept of self-determination and pleaded for its application in India. Tilak held that the attainment of 'Swarajya' would be a great victory for Indian nationalism. He treated 'Swarajya' not merely as right, but as 'dharma' (religion). He encouraged two festivals of Shivaji and Ganapati. Shivaji is the symbol of boldness and greatness and Ganapati is the symbol of wisdom. He endeavoured to establish unity among the people through festivals. Like Vivekananda, the ideal of unity in diversity was his mission. But unlike Tilak, Vivekananda doesn't directly think regarding politics. He puts that

the freedom of mankind can be had through the true knowledge of the indifference between the general self and the Brahman, the highest reality. Vivekananda's intention was to render service for the betterment of the poor, illiterate and ignorant masses of India. He wanted them to be free from the constant influence of ignorance, lack of food stuff, nutrition etc. Vivekananda wholeheartedly wanted purification of the self and the true emancipation of his people.

Tilak didn't support the view of certain ancient Sanskrit treaties which bifurcate the same into niti dharma meaning legal-jurisprudence and good conduct respectively. Niti, Kartavya or dharma are synonymous for Tilak. We have seen that religion meant for Vivekananda the practical religion from the practical Vedanta. Vivekananda asserts that religion is a matter of experience regarding non-duality between the self and the Brahman. But, it is noteworthy that the religious thinking of Tilak was highly influenced by the then political circumstances and the changes. His chief objective was to establish a complete 'Swarajya' through religious ideals. He took religion as medium of solving the social problems. Interestingly, Vivekananda regarded service to the poor is like service to the God. Here lies similarity of ideals of thought between Tilak and Vivekananda.

Tilak agreed with Sankaracharya in making a distinction between 'Nirguna Brahma' and 'Saguna' Brahma, the absolute without attributes and God as endowed with attributes. He was also in similar voice with Sankara when he said that the endowment with attributes was the result of the illusory 'Maya'. But, for Vivekananda, 'Saguna Brahma' and 'Nirguna Brahma' are equally valuable and important though he treats God as a matter of deep contemplation through right knowledge.

Tilak was sometimes not seemed to be consistent in his teaching. He, at some places, commented that 'jnana', the path of knowledge was the only way for realizing the identity of Atman and Brahman. But, at some other places, he considers that means to self-realization consists of a combination of 'jnana' and 'karma' (knowledge and action). But, on the other hand, it is to be noted that the combination is not possible in view of Advaita as the content and the fruit of jnana are different from 'Karma'. The self which is the content of 'jnana' is one, independent and eternal whereas actions are many and are dependent on causal correlates and are transient. The fruit of knowledge is release while the enjoyments of those actions bound the soul all the more in 'samsara'. The most important point is that the non-dual self is ever existent and it doesn't depend on human activity.

Tilak, as an advaitin, agrees with Adi Guru Sankaracharya in putting the fact that the Ultimate Reality, Brahman – Atman is non-dual and of the nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss; that the world of plurality is an appearance of Brahman, that what is responsible for this appearance is the illusory maya; and that the so-called individual soul (jiva) is no other than Brahman.

In accordance with Tilak, 'Karma' (action) possesses a very dominating impact on the religious life-style. He distinctly upholds the necessary role of 'Karma' in one's religious life with the assistance of Lord Krishna's declaration in the Bhagavad Geeta: 'what is action and what is inaction...here even the learned people are deluded'. And again he puts 'he who sees action in inaction and inaction in action...he alone really sees'.

For Tilak, the combination of 'jnana' and 'karma' (jnana-karma samuccaya) is the means to release but this combination is not possible in the view of Advaita. It cannot be the object of doing, not doing, or doing otherwise. It is non-modifiable. Action disappears along with its cause which is nescience or ignorance.

The aspirant, who is eligible for Vedanta study which leads to release, is the one who has renounced all attachment to works.

Tilak's religious philosophy is very important for his realistic explanation of the Vedanta philosophy. He puts that man can never bring into grip the realization of one's own Self without its realistic understanding through the fire of true knowledge. That is why Tilak can be said to be a very good follower of the Vedanta philosophy. According to Tilak, the 'jivan mukti' is virtuous by nature, and not under the compulsion of any ethical law. In the work called the Naiskarmya-siddhi by Suresvaracarya (one of the four main disciples of Adi Sankara), we find this point clearly expressed : "if the man who has awakened to the non-dual reality behaves as he likes, what then is the difference between a dog and man of knowledge in the matter of eating prohibited food?"⁶

Tilak reiterates that the destination of human beings is to understand the indifferent identity between Brahman and Atman. He asserts that one who has realized the true identity of Brahman and Atman before death is called 'jivanamukta'. For Tilak, the man of jivanamukta reaches the 'Brahmaloka' after this body is cremated. This is also known as 'karma-mukti' or gradual release or 'videha mukti' or bodily release. Three duties, according to Tilak, are prescribed in the Geeta to the 'jnani' or the realized person. By realizing the identity between Brahman and Atman, his mind should be peaceful, non-contradictory, equal and free from the objects of pleasure. Secondly, one should perform one's duties to set an example for others. Thirdly, he should make everyone progress step by step peacefully. Tilak says that the 'jnani' or the sane people should perform all the specific functions even in his perfect state, the specific functions pertaining to one's family and to one's nation. One has to accept religion or right action as a revelation, as one accepts the existence of the non-dual Brahman as revealed by the Vedas. Tilak puts that 'dharma' (religion) in Indian philosophy, controls 'karma' and 'artha', but leads to moksha.

Conclusion:

From what has been discussed above, it can be mentioned here that Adiguru Sankaracharya was directly followed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak while Vivekananda, with independent views, was more or less influenced by Sankara.

The teachings of Tilak are those of Advaita. He agrees with Sankara in maintaining that the Ultimate Reality, Brahman-Atman is non-dual and of the nature of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss; that the world of plurality is an appearance of Brahman; that what is responsible for this appearance is the illusory maya and that the so-called individual soul (jiva) is no other than Brahman. He has very rightly judged that religion is the greatest potential energy that could be tapped easily, and hence, has utilized scriptures, the religious festivals, etc., for his cause of the freedom movement. The spirit of nationalism was the prime factor for Tilak. He endeavoured to establish this spirit in the hearts of the people of India through religious performances. He asserts that jnana, the way of knowledge, is the only way to realize the identity between Brahman and Atman. To him, karma-yoga is not preliminary to jnana-yoga, rather superior to it. He treats karma-yoga as inclusive of all other yoga defining it as jnana-mulaka-bhaktipradhanya-karma-yoga (knowledge oriented devotion predominant path of action).

Keeping consistency with the classical Advaita, Tilak puts that the ajnana or ignorance makes the jiva unable to realize the eternal nature of the self. The jiva discovers its original identity with Brahman as ajnana

or ignorance is removed. He says that all men are basically same, i.e., there is a basic unity underlying this universe as revelation of the same Reality or Brahman.

It has come to notice that the Advaita is the prime source of inspiration of the teachings of the contemporary Indian thinkers. Tilak, influenced by the Bhagavad Geeta, agrees fully with Sankara. They differ merely in regard to the means to release. Because, 'jnana' for Sankara is the direct means and karma-yoga an auxiliary, to Tilak, on the other hand, release may be achieved by 'karma' also or as in combination with 'jnana'. B.G.Tilak in similar voice with Vivekananda holds the underlying unity between God, man and the world.

On the other hand, Vivekananda advocated a man-making religion. In accordance with him, religion possesses two modern theories -- the spirit theory of religion and the evolution of the Idea of the Infinite. Vivekananda says that man desires to know the truth behind death or the power behind nature. He arrives at the third universal generalization out of which everything else comes. The primal cause Brahman must be identical with the most significant effect. The last generalization, Brahman, is attributeless, is Absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. According to him, Hinduism is comprehensive as it includes the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, the practice of idol worship and its mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jainas. Here lies the relevance of the religious teachings of both Vivekananda and Tilak to the modern India.

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