UNIT 1: TILAK'S INTERPRETATION OF THE *GĪTĀ*

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the philosophy of the *Gītā* as interpreted by Tilak.
- explain the different concepts of the *Gītā*like Brahman, ¹tman, World as interpreted by Tilak.
- discuss the different types of yogas as interpreted by Tilak.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was born on 23.07.1856 in Sadoba Gore's house in the city of Ratnagiari. He was originally known as Keshab, but everyone later called him 'Bal' lovingly. He was selected to Bombay Legislative Council in 1895 and in 1897. He published anti-British articles for which he was sentenced to six years rigorous imprisonment. He was kept in the Mandayalaya Jail where he wrote the famous book "*Gītā* Rahasya" which is comprised of two volumes, in

support of the independence and real human action. The ideal of the *Gītā* in the context of political and social life, took a vital position in Tilak's interpretation of the *Gītā*. Most probably, his commentary is the first, which interprets *Gītā*'s preaching from the ethico-pragmatic point of view laying much importance on Karma-Yoga than the theory of renunciation.

1.3 THE METAPHYSICAL POSITION OF TILAK

As metaphysics is the study of Reality, *Gītā*'s metaphysics can also be understood with regard to the concept of Reality. In the *Gītā* Krishna is considered as Ultimate Reality. Therefore,*Gītā*'s metaphysics involves the study of the nature of Krishna.Tilak in his interpretation of *Gita* has pointed out the metaphysics with the concept of Ultimate Reality, individual self, and the world. Let us have a brief detail of *Gītā*'s metaphysical concepts as interpreted by Tilak————————

1.3.1 Tilak's View on Ultimate Reality

By following SaAkara, Tilak describes the nature of *Gītā*'s Ultimate Reality as that, "howmuchsoever one may examine the visible world, and come to the conclusion that the sensory nerves of the eyes possesses particular properties,yet, the one has ascertained this remains a separate entity." Tilak adds that one should not use mere imagination and inference to derive conclusions about the Absolute Reality, which is beyond the reach of sense organ. So for Tilak, sruti i.e. śabda pramāna consisting of experiences gained by authorities alone is the valid source of the understanding of the nature of the Ultimate Reality. *Gītā*'s Reality is permanent and non-dual which is known as the Self, Purucottama, Paramapuruca, Parāmātman, and Parābrahman. In the *Gītā* Rahasya, Tilak describes two aspects of the Absolute Reality or Brahman, the manifest (vyakta) and the unmanifest (avyakta). Further, thereare two forms of unmanifest Brahman, the saguGa (with attributes) and nirguGa (without attributes). Tilak states that the *Gītā* describes only the manifest form of Lord

Krishna who is the incarnation of the creator Parameswara. However, the manifest form of Brahman is not the object of attainment, but an illusory manifestation. The unmanifest is the principal aspect. The change from the unmanifest to the manifest is due to the power of illusion known as 'māyā'.

Tilak has emphasised the necessity of the technique of superimposition and subsequent denial for the understanding of the nature of the non-dual Brahman. In order to help the aspirant to understand the nature of Brahman, first attributes like creation, sustenance, and destruction of the universe are ascribed to the attributeless Brahman and subsequently denied. Thus, all the accidental nature of Brahman is denied finally, accepting only the essential nature of Brahman as Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. Again, Tilak states that the different forms of Brahman are symbolic in nature meant for worship. He adds that the nirguGa Brahman can be realised only after understanding the nature of saguGa Brahman (the form with qualities) and by "gradually omitting quality after quality". In other words, by withdrawing the superimposed qualities gradually, one can realise the attributeless Brahman. Further, the *Gītā* uses some terms like distant, near, existent, non-existent to describe the nature of Brahman. These terms areself-contradictory as they cannot be applied to the one Being at the same time. But this is self-contradiction when applied to empirical being, while these contradictions have no sense when they are applied to the Supreme Being which is beyond empirical world. The application of these terms is implicative in the sense that Brahman can be considered as all pervasive and eternal Reality, which exists in an independent state.

1.3.2 The Individual Self

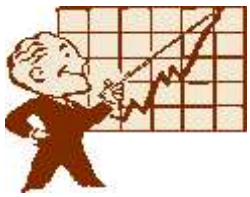
The individual self, is defined in the *Gītā* as a part (amca) of the Lord who is the soul inhabiting the heart of all created

beings. The individual self is called the Atman when it is imprisoned in the body, and Absolute self is called Paramātman when it is released from the body or matter. The word 'part' should not be taken in the sense of 'an independent piece which has been cut out'. Infact, the individual is a part of the Absolute Self, which is wrongly viewed as apart due to ignorance. Tilak gives the argument to establish the identity between Brahman and Atman like that, " the Brahman and the Atman must be uniform; because, as the synthesis of the impressions created by the mind by the various objects in the world, which (synthesis) results from the activity of the Atman, must be the counterpart of the synthesis of all objects in the world made of Brahman (which is the root of those objects) by breaking up their diversity; if not, all knowledge will be without foundation and will fall flat. And it now follows a natural conclusion that though these two elements, which arrives at two exactly similar synthesis may be in two different places, they cannot be different from each other; and that, the form of the Brahman must be the same as the form of the Atman." Tilak points out that this identity can only be experienced. The non-dual experience is described in the *Gītā* as, "all created beings are within Him and He is in all created beings."

1.3.2 World

According to Tilak, in the *Gītā*, Ká^]a is manifested in two types of nature. And the two types of nature are related to the creation of the universe. Prakáti is the lower nature, between the two nature of Ká^]a. It is also called the material cause of the universe. Prakáti is eightfold. According to the *Gītā,* the eightfold Prakáti is consisted of five great elements, mind Ká^]a, intellect and ego. That higher nature is nothing but the Self, which is constituted of pure consciousness or awareness. The higher and lower nature of Ká^]a, each functioning in the embrace of the other, cause all the manifestations of the world of plurality.

Without the presence of one nature, creation is not possible. Therefore, it can be said that in the *Gītā* that womb is prakáti. From this womb, the world is said to be arisen. In that Prakáti, Krishna is said to place the germ, the seed of the birth of Hiranyagarbha, the seed which gives birth to all beings. This affirms that all existence are manifestation of the Divine. He is the cosmic seed. With reference to the world, He becomes the Hiranyagarbha, the cosmic soul. Krishna is the father who deposits in the womb, which is not self, the seed which is essential of life, thus causing the birth of every individual. So the world can be considered as the play of the Infinite on the finite.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1. According to Tilak, the *Gītā* talks about the identification of the.....

..... and.....

Q.2. According to Tilak, the *Gītā* describes two kinds of Brahman. They are.....

A)..... B).....

1.4 THE ETHICAL POSITION OF TILAK

Ethics is generally understood as the study of value and morals. It discusses what should one do in certain situations. The ethics of the *Gītā* was introduced at the very starting point of the book and it refers to the situation where the *Gītā* was written. In the battlefield, when Arjuna was perplexed by not being able to decide what to do, Lord Krishna taught him about his duty and helped him to decide what is better for him. With this regard the concept of yoga was introduced and the *Gītā* teaches how these three yogas i.e. jñāna-yoga, karma-yoga and bhakti-yoga will be helpful in living one's life as well as in getting liberation. Tilak interprets *Gītā*'s concept of three yogas. Let us discuss these three yogas. ————

1.4.1 Jñāna-Yoga Or The Way Of Knowledge

According to Tilak, in the *Gītā,* knowledge is the goal of action. Here knowledge does not mean any kind of knowledge of external objects. Rather it means the discriminative knowledge of the soul and matter. Knowledge means self-realisation, by which we become aware of our real nature. It isbelieved that wisdom grows within the knower. *Gītā* says, "there is nothing on earth equal in purity to wisdom. He who becomes perfected by yoga finds this of himself, in his self in course of time". In order to know the real nature of the self, one has to know that the self is different from the body. While the body undergoes changes, the soul remains unchanged. Here body can be considered as prakáti and soul can be considered as puru^a. However, unlike Sa+khya system the dualism between puru^a and prakáti is dissolved in the *Gītā*, as these two are considered as the two nature of Krishna Himself. And, therefore, both of them are subordinate to God. The self realizes its freedom when it clearly realizes the differentiation from the evolutes of prakáti. Prakáti is made up of gu]as, which are responsible for the sense experience and these experiences are the cause of desires. When one gets knowledge about the differentiation from matter, it willnot be affected by the guGas, which are the constituents of prakáti. Further *Gītā* says that when the soul can disconnect itself from matter, it can connect with the Indwelling God, which is of the same nature. Therefore, knowledge means the knowledge of the Supreme i.e., the highest self-knowledge. Tilak accepts jñāna-yoga as a path of attaining God, but as a subservient to karma-yoga.

1.4.2 Karma-Yoga or the Way of Action

According to Tilak, *Gītā*'s concept of karma-yoga is nothing but a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom from bondage. The main purpose of the *Gītā* is to show how Krishna teaches the science of karma-yoga to Arjuna when

the latter wanted to give up the Kurukcetra war and renounce the world. In this context, Arjuna asked Krishna, "if you think knowledge is superior to action, O Janardana why do you tell me to involve in this dangerous work? Then in answer Krishna replies by favouring karma-yoga as, "no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature." The problem with karma is that, it is supposed to bind man. And as it is a way of getting liberation, so it cannot bind anyone. So, the way *Gītā* suggested to perform action according to Tilak is that, "resigning all thy works to Me, with thy consciousness fixed in the Self, being free from desire and egoism, fight, delivered from thy fever". This is the basic concept of law of karma for attaining liberation.Thus, the *Gītā* condemns outer renunciation and commends inward renunciation. Tilak's view of karma-yoga is very significant not only to ethics, but also to politics. He could state that karma-yoga is not only the way of ethical goal-(Brahman), but also the way of political goal or swarajya and social good or goal. Political goal is based on swarajya, which comes from inborn aspect or nature of soul. Self-realised person can work for reality of swaraj.So, every self-realised performer or karma-yogi fundamentally knows the necessityof swarajya for which Tilak said, "to strive for freedom (of swarajya or ethics)" was an 'inherent right of every people'. According to Tilak, though the *Gītā* talks aboutjñāna-yoga and bhakti-yoga, yet it put emphasis on karma-yoga as the ultimate way to attain liberation. This is so because, the principal aim and purpose of the *Gītā* was to elaborate and critically evaluate the characteristic features and concepts of the karma-yoga as religious and moral attitude for the perfect development of man. The reason as to why Tilak considers karma-yoga as the supreme way to liberation is that even after getting jñāna-bhakti and liberation, that person must performs action until bideha mukti.Tilak's interpretation was the first systematic ethico-

pragmatic philosophy, which gives more importance on karma-yoga than the theory of renunciation and isolation from society as well as the world.

1.4.3 Bhakti –Yoga or the Way of Devotion

Tilak holds the view that devotion or bhakti can never become the supreme path by following which one can ultimately attains Release. There are two ways to attain liberation and they are the way of knowledge and the way of action. Although bhakti may be called a yoga in the sense that it is a means, yet it can never be considered an ultimate way according to Tilak. So, for Tilak, the *Gītā* supports only one path viz. the path of karma-yoga which is based on knowledge and devotion is an important factor in it. In other words, devotion is necessary for knowledge and without knowledge the performance of disinterested action is not possible. Thus, Tilak stated that, "desireless karma which includes both knowledge and devotion is the most superior path of all, according to the *Gītā*. Now the query comes as, how devotion is auxiliary to knowledge and then action, Tilak states that as the process of devotion is based on the duality of the worshiper and the worshipped, no devotion or any kind of worship survives in the ultimate state of the merger of the Atman into Brahman i.e. liberation. Regarding the nature of worship, which is a factor of devotion, *Gītā* states that no matter in which way the devotee worships, God is ready to accept it. No one worships any image without believing that the Lord inhabits it. When the devotee surrenders himself completely to God, He gradually increases his concentration of understanding and makes him ultimately fully realize His own nature. In this regard*Gītā* states that, "by devotion, he acquires the essential knowledge of how and what I am; and when he has thus essentially recognised Me, he becomes merged in Me." As there is no conflict between knowledge and desireless action, similarly there is no conflict

between devotion and the kind of action that are performed with the idea of dedicating all fruits of action to God. Thus, according to Tilak, the *Gītā* advocates desireless action combined with intense devotion. Once one can devote himself fully to the Lord, he will no more be attached to the earthly things. In this way, devotion has become auxiliary to action, which is the supreme way to attain liberation, according to Tilak's interpretation of *Gītā*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3: State whether the following statements are True or False

a) According to Tilak karma-yoga is superior to jñāna-yoga and bhakti-yoga. (true/false)

b) Jñāna-yoga is the discriminative knowledge between soul and matter. (true/false)

c) According to Tilak karma-yoga is possible after attaining jñāna-yoga. (true/false)

d) Bhaktiyoga is auxiliary to jñāna-yoga and jñāna-yoga is auxulliry to karma-yoga. (true/false)



1.5 LET US SUM UP

- Tilak's *Gītā*-Rahasya basically deals with the metaphysics and Ethics of the *Gītā*.
- Within its Metaphysics, it discusses the *Gītā*'s concept of Brahman, Atman, and World.
- Within its Ethics, it discusses the three different yogas and how they are linked up.
- Tilak in this book tries to show how karma-yoga and swaraj are related and it involves both social and political Philosophy.



1.6 FURTHER READING

1) Tilak , B.G. (Volume I) (1935). *Śrīmad Bhagawadgītārahasya*. Poona: M/S Tilak Bros.
2) Tilak , B.G. (Volume II) (1935). *Śrīmad Bhagawadgītārahasya*. Poona: M/S Tilak Bros.
3) Saroja, G.V. (1985). *Tilak and SaAkara on the Gītā*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
4) Kalita, H. C. (201). *Gītā: A Synthesis Yoga*, Guwahati: EBH Publishers.



1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Individual self and Absolute Self.

Ans to Q No 2: NirguGa Brahman and SaguGa Brahman.

Ans to Q No 5: a) True b) True c) True d) True



1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Very short questions:

Q 1: Write the name of the book written by Tilak as a commentary on *Gītā*.

Q 2: How many volumes are written by Tilak on the *Gītā*?

Q 3: According to Tilak, *Gītā* accepts how many kinds f Brahman?

Q 4: Does *Gītā* accept the creation of the world or reject?

Q 5: Jñāna-yoga refers to the knowledge of internal objects/external objects. Write the correct anaswer.

Q 6: What kind of renunciation does the *Gītā* talk about?

Q 7: According to Tilak, which yoga is superior to the other yogas?

B. Short questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)

Q 1: Write short notes on the following concepts.

a) The *Gītā*'s concept of jñāna-yoga.

b) The *Gītā*'s concept of karma-yoga.

c) The *Gītā*'s concept of bhakti-yoga.

c) Long Questions (Answer in question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the metaphysical concepts of the *Gītā* interpreted by Tilak.

Q 2: Discuss the ethical concepts of the *Gītā* interpreted by Tilak.

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