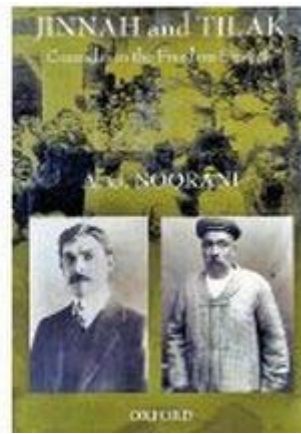
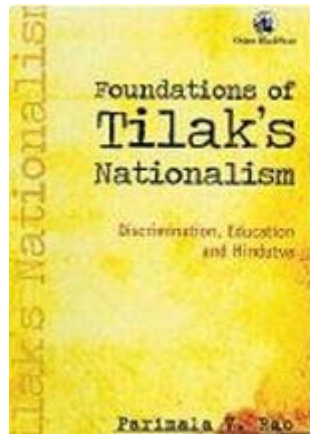


A critical study on Tilak, Jinnah

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FOUNDATIONS OF TILAK'S NATIONALISM - Discrimination, Education and Hindutva: Parimala V. Rao; Orient Blackswan, 1/24, Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi-110002.

JINNAH AND TILAK - Comrades in the Freedom Struggle: A.G. Noorani; Oxford University Press, YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi-110001. Rs. 795.

Images of mighty historical figures often circulate as fond stereotypes — good, bad and ugly. They also have the power of indoctrinating society into believing that they are inviolable. If Tilak is routinely identified with his “Swaraj is my birthright” assertion, Jinnah is invariably hailed as the creator of Pakistan. But historians are like gadflies; they ask new questions and find new answers or disturb the old ones. Nor can historical figures refuse to take the dope test periodically. The two books under review do what historians worth their salt ought to do, though with different degrees of success.

Conservative

Parimala Rao's book *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism* is a critical interrogation of the Lokamanya's brand and base of aggressive nationalism, which is traditionally pitted against those of the 'reformers' who allegedly chose to be critical of their own society rather than the foreign rule or against the 'moderates' who were sneered at for their 'political mendicancy.' After a study of the writings of Tilak in *The Mahratta*, she concludes that they undermine the myth of the Lokamanya.

Far from being “the most consistent and forward-looking leader,” as Lenin hailed him, the pages of *The Mahratta* show him up as an arch conservative, a champion of varnashrama order and Brahmanical supremacy, a consistent opponent of the lower-caste aspirations which Mahatma Jotirao Phule and his 'Satyashodak Samaj' articulated and worked for, and as one who worked against all the reformist efforts of the likes of Justice M.G. Ranade, G.K. Gokhale, B.M. Malabari, and Pandita Ramabai. Besides, Tilak comes across as a strong supporter of Khots, Inamdars, and moneylenders, whom he called “god of peasants,” ostensibly to throw the blame for rural indebtedness on the colonial government. He famously opposed any effort to give women and lower classes access to education, and was a fierce opponent of women's emancipation.

Rao shows that Tilak's Brahmin-centred Hindutva had its points of agreement with other outfits that emerged in Indian politics, although some of them sought to cast their net wide.

In a world where iconic figures are fanatically guarded against heresies or sought to be given legislative protection, Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism may be seen as asking too many uncomfortable questions. But the pages of *The Mahratta* are too eloquent to be ignored. What Rao has done is to subject Tilak to the rigours of a historian's scrutiny, and she has done it brilliantly.

The other book, A.G. Noorani's *Jinnah and Tilak* may kindle a reader's curiosity and hopes more than it can satisfy. It is rather a book on Jinnah that is tenuously tethered to Tilak. Except that Jinnah defended Tilak in the law court, expressed admiration for his nationalist fervour, and had worked with him in hammering out the Lucknow Pact (1916), there is little to connect the two leaders meaningfully. Tilak died in 1920, and Jinnah's decisive political positions and active role came only thereafter. One is not able to figure out how the two could be meaningfully referred to as "comrades in the freedom struggle." The linking of the unlikely titans is attempted only in the first chapter of the book.

Assessment

The other chapters make a critical assessment of the Jinnah phenomenon in Indian politics. Noorani's review of Jinnah's relations with the Congress at different stages and with its leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Rajaji; his attitude and responses to the Cripps and the Cabinet Missions are interesting, though not new. There is much to say in favour of his argument: "...the final responsibility for partition was not his [Jinnah's]. In the decisive phase in 1946, he thrice discarded partition in favour of a united India...But a united India implied a sharing of power, which the Congress abhorred... Jinnah was an expellee, not an exile." Besides, the supportive 'Appendices' occupy close to 300 page of the book.

At the end of it all, one could discern a thought, with a nostalgic tinge, lurking in the latter chapters of the book: how, if only the Lokamanya were alive, the mistakes the Congress made, or insisted on making, would not have wrecked the Indian unity. Even if one is to pass over the occasional dialogue with counterfactual history, the apparitional bridge that the book conjures up between Jinnah and Tilak hardly inspires confidence for any meaningful traffic of ideas or connection between historical situations.