

BAL GANGADHAR TILAK: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHTS

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Abstract: Bal Gangadhar Tilak was one of the most prominent freedom fighters who raised his voice against injustice and suppression whether political or social, especially when the country was shackled in chains. Any slave country does not only suffer economically but loses its strength to fight with self-confidence. He played different roles right from his student age. He contributed in education, journalism and political field in idealistic manner. Though he had to suffer a lot due to this but he never compromised with his principles. Though he was considered as an extremist but was equally respected by the moderates.

Key words: Shikshak-Teacher, Deccan- South; Lokmanya-Accepted by Public; Chachi-Paternal aunt; Sun-Surya

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was born on 23rd July, 1856 at Ratnagiri. His name was Keshav but was called 'Bal' and which continued throughout his life.ⁱ His father Gangadhar Pant was an employee of education department and was posted at Pune as Assistant Deputy Educational Inspector. During his childhood he lost his mother and was brought up by his paternal uncle Govindrao Tilak and his wife.ⁱⁱ At Pune he got admission in High School. Due to the efforts of his father, he was able to memorize many things at a very young age and was also good in Sanskrit and Maths. He was married at young age as per tradition with Tapi in 1871. In 1872 he lost his father and he was under the patronage of his uncle Govind Rao. He was married at young age as per tradition with Tapi in 1871. After passing matriculation, he got admission in Deccan College for higher education. His sharp mind and wide knowledge made him famous at young age. In 1877 he passed graduation B. A. with mathematics in first division. He left his M. A. incomplete and passed LLB in 1879.

During college days, his close friend was G. G. Agarkar who belonged to a poor family. They used to talk on each and every issue. They had difference of opinion regarding service towards Nation. Tilak was of the opinion that the first the country should be independent politically but Agarkar was of the view that the social work and social reforms are more important than the political freedom. Tilak was fond of maths while Agarkar's favourite subject was philosophy. Both Agarkar and Tilak were not only limited to their discussions but wanted something to be done practically also. At that time Mahadev Govind Ranade had founded 'Saravjanik Sabha' so it was but natural that both friends are attracted towards it. They were having great respect for Ranade. In 1872 they read an article of Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar in a monthly journal 'Shalapatrak' with a title 'Shikshak ke kam'.ⁱⁱⁱ In this article Vishnu Shastri expressed his views regarding the purpose and utility of education. If the teacher is having a special and clear aim then the education is just like iron sword. He wanted to open a New English School. Both decided to work in the field of education and requested to enrol themselves as

teachers in this New English School. On 2nd January, 1880 this school was established. Vaman Shivram Apte was appointed as principal and other famous teacher Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi was also associated with this. When the other students of the Deccan college, after completing the education, were opting for government jobs and some were practising law, these two friends decided to devote life for social welfare and to create awareness among the youth of the nation. With the devotion and dedication of the teachers of this New School, the enrolment of the students increased from 35 to 336 in just one year. Principal of Deccan College Wordsworth wrote that 'I am really surprised at the success this school has achieved. English education has built a new power in Hindi society. In my opinion, this school is an example.'^{iv} On 24th October 1884, Deccan Education Society was founded which started Fergusson College in 1885.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak was so fond of mathematics that one day he was roaming in a corridor while thinking on a question of mathematics. One friend asked him that why are you worrying about it, you should consult your teacher, Tilak replied that the solution of this question has not been mentioned even in the book and I am trying to find that how we can solve it in some different way. After getting solution he went to Professor Chhatri who found that it is very accurate. Then he called the other students and said, "Tilak is a son of Surya".^v He used to involve himself so much in teaching mathematics that he used to explain a major part of by Binomial Theorem without consulting a book.

During this time Chiplunkar, Tilak and Agarkar decided to start newspapers and after some hurdles on 2nd January, 1881, 'Maratha' weekly was started in English^{vi} and after two days on 4th of January 'Kesari' weekly was started in Marathi.^{vii} Editor of Maratha was Tilak while Kesari Editor was Agarkar. As they were not having enough economic resources to continue with these newspapers, they did a lot of other work to meet the expenditure for this newspaper. To avoid more expenditure, they even learnt how to repair the printing machines. During the first year of Kesari, it had articles on the subjects of history, economics and social issues which were written by Agarkar while Tilak wrote articles on religion, philosophy and law. In 1884-85 Kesari got its 4500 copies printed while Maratha was continued in deficit. Articles written in Kesari were not only against the British government but also against the corrupt princely states and for this purpose they even got trapped in a conspiracy. They got some article publish with wrong facts criticizing a conspiracy against Raja Shivaji Raje fourth of Kolhapur. The Diwan of Kolhapur Madhavrao V. Barve filed a defamation suit against them. Both Agarkar and Tilak accepted honestly and were imprisoned for four months. They were imprisoned in Dongri Jail of Bombay. Agarkar wrote a small book '101 days in Jail.'^{viii} On 27th October 1885 they were released.

Now ideological differences among these two friends increased further. In 1884 on the issue of law banning Child marriages, Agarkar opposed child marriage in his article, while Tilak did not support child marriage but opposed and criticized the interference from the British government in the religious affairs. Their differences increased up to such an extent that there were now two groups of life members among the Deccan Educational Society. One was supporting the old traditions and they were supporting Tilak while the other was supporting

Agarkar. Agarkar started a new newspaper in 1888 named 'Sudharak.' At this time, crisis developed in Deccan Education Society. Strong difference of opinion emerged between Tilak and other members. Ultimately Tilak resigned in 1890 stating, "I am giving up my life's ideal, but the thought that by separating myself from it, I shall serve it best is my consolation. While I have been with you, I have not spared myself in serving the interests of the institution and I shall not imperil its existence by continuing longer with you.... I bid you, my dear colleagues, good-bye with my heart burdened with a lot of sorrow, but in the hope that by severing myself from you, I may perhaps help you in preserving harmony, so very essential for the welfare of our institution. It is for the sake of that harmony that I am making sacrifice of self."^{ix}

However, Tilak continued to be involved in controversies on social issues or reforms. The Rakhmabai case put him as opponent of women's emancipation. Rakhmabai did not want to stay with her husband Dadaji on the plea that this marriage was solemnized against her wish. Lower court decided in her favour but the High Court decided against her. Tilak welcomed the High Court's verdict upholding Hindu law and custom and wrote articles in Kesari. Another controversy arose on the issue of 'Age of Consent Bill' which was presented in the Imperial Legislative Council with the efforts of Malabari and his friends on January 9, 1891. Its main clause was that intercourse with wife below the age of 12 years should be penalised. Tilak opposed the Bill on the ground that it is an interference in Hindu religious beliefs. He campaigned against it. He proposed that girls and boys should not be married before the age of 14 years and 20 years respectively, remarriage of man should be with widow only, ban on liquor, abolishing of dowry, widows should not be tonsured etc.^x However, the bill was passed in spite of public opposition. In October 1891, happened 'Panch Houd' episode. In those days, for a Brahmin to take food with Christian was considered defilement of caste and atonement was only through Prayaschitta-purificatory rites. Tilak and Ranade were involved in this. Ranade subjected himself to Prayaschitta but Tilak did so on his own terms after strongly pleading his case before the Shankaracharya. His orthodox prosecutor was Sardar Balasaheb Natu. Tilak said, "The reformers want to bring about social reforms with a magic wand. We think that reforms can be brought about in conformity with the spirit of the times and the environment. We all have families and want to live with society. Under these circumstances a compromise between the individual's wishes and society's expectations would have to be arrived at. Reforms accomplished through such compromises would alone endure. Those who only want to live according to their own individual whims should do so on a desert island. Others who want to live in a society will have to follow a path of compromises."^{xi} Similar was the infamous case of Pandita Ramabai. Though belonged to orthodox upbringing and having wider knowledge of scriptures, she was converted to Christianity. She was running a school for girls named Sharda Sadan. People like Bhandarkar, K. T. Telang and M. G. Ranade were associated with this school. Tilak, an earlier sympathiser, when came to know about the intentions of Ramabai making conversions, exposed her. He wrote, "Christian women trying to infiltrate in our society under the cloak of female education and their supporters- however learned- would be regarded by us as enemies of the people and of Hinduism."^{xii} Ultimately Bhandarkar and Ranade too severed their

connection and five years later she moved the school to Kedgaon and made it part of Christian organization called Mukti Sadan or 'Home of Salvation.'^{xiii} Tilak was not to follow the line of reformers in toto. As he said that 'he would not recognize God if He said that untouchability was ordained by Him.'^{xiv}

Tilak started the Ganpati and Shivaji festivals in Maharashtra though it was assumed in the beginning as a reaction towards Muslims Muharram celebration. But Tilak denied it categorically and rather advocated that both should participate in each other's festivals. Shivaji festival was inaugurated in 1896 while Ganpati festival was started earlier. He not only took a prominent part in organising it but also ensured that these should be popularised all over Maharashtra. No doubt the emphasis of the festival was on social consolidation but it also helped a lot in political awakening. First Shivaji festival was held at Raigad on April 15, 1896 where he was crowned and he got an encouraging response from the people including The Princes and the Sardars. In the preparatory meeting Tilak purposed that a memorial of Shivaji should be brought up and he said that though it can be possible by the donation from Maharaja of Kolhapur but he would like that the common people should join hands for this purpose by donating one paisa. Tilak wrote, "Hero worship is a thing deeply implanted in human nature and our political aspirations lead all the strength. Of which the worship of an Indian hero is likely to inspire into our minds for this purpose there can be no better person than Shivaji."^{xv} He assured the Muslims that the Shivaji festival is not celebrated to alienate them. The Muslims and the Hindus are in the same boat so far as political conditions of the people are concerned.

In 1896, Maharashtra was in the grip of famine. The Famine Relief Code which was enacted after 1876 famine was not implemented and deferred on some ground or the other. Tilak raised the concern regarding the grievances of the peasantry and said that they have the right under famine relief code. He himself organised relief work. The code was translated into Marathi and thousands of copies were freely distributed to the affected areas. Peasantry was educated and mobilised to fight natural calamity. He said, "Had such a famine broken out in England and had the prime minister been as apathetic as our viceroy his government would have fallen down in no time!"^{xvi} The government was forced to implement Famine Relief Code and a famine fund was also established. Famine relief work was highly useful as it not only addressed in economic sphere but also created political awakening.

In 1897, plague broke out in Pune and the other districts of Maharashtra. Regarding this Epidemic Diseases Act was passed on February 4, 1897 which gave drastic powers to the authorities to detain steamer passengers, examine railway passengers and to segregate those affected to hospitals. Any house could be searched and any person compulsorily segregated without notice. In the beginning Tilak had an attitude of co-operation with the authorities but when the stupidity of anti-plague activities under Mr. Rand increased, he said, "Although from a scientific point of view segregation is of great use, still the adverse notions of the community about hospitals, the usual way in which the rulers conduct themselves towards the ruled and the other reasons have rendered it almost impossible to bring segregation into practice. To what extent the impression that a hospital means a place for killing person has taken deep root in the

community will be easily scene from the fanciful rumours in connection with this which one often one hears in Pune and Bombay. This terror about hospitals has been aggravated by the acts of some of the unscrupulous policeman.”^{xvii} To restore public confidence Tilak established a private hospital and opened a fund for relief. However, on June 22, 1897, Rand and lieutenant Ayerst were murdered while returning from a dinner in celebration of Queen’s diamond jubilee. This incident shock the people and made government virtually lose its head.

Tilak was arrested in Bombay on July 27, 1897 on the charges of sedition. He was charged under section 124A which meant exciting feelings of disaffection. Though he was granted bail on August 4 but case was registered and the trial started. On September 14, he was sentenced for eighteen months rigorous imprisonment. Public reaction to Tilak’s conviction varied from anguished to anger. Three months later at Congress session, Surendranath Banerjee declared, “My heart is full of sympathy and my feelings go forth with him in his prison home for whom the nation is in tears. Speaking for the Indian press, I have no hesitation in saying that we believe Mr. Tilak to be innocent of the charges brought against him.”^{xviii} Tilak was not given the facilities of political prisoners being guilty of sedition. He was subjected to harsh treatment. Due to spread of plague in Bombay he was transferred to Yervada Jail Pune. He got a complimentary copy of the Rig Veda from Professor Max Mueller who had found a high opinion of Tilak’s scholarship from his Orion. It became the basis of his book ‘The Arctic home in the Vedas.’^{xix} He was released on September 6, 1898. He was a wreck of his former self. His nephew said that he returned home in his skeleton, eyes sung deep, cheeks pallid and pinched and gait unsteady.

During the next few years, he was deeply involved in the infamous Tai Maharaj case. Issue of adopting a son and the will of Tai Maharaj for his estate turned into ugly events. Tilak was one of the trustees but he was trapped in a conspiracy. For that purpose, he had to face the anger of the British official Aston. On April 4, 1902 seven charges were formulated against him under criminal procedure code, i.e., Tilak made fast complaints of breach of trust against Nagpurkar, fabricated false evidence, made forgery, used ingenuine evidence known to be false, used the ingenuine adoption deed and have given farts evidence intentionally. Tilak stood vindicated at last but he had to pass through a fiery ordeal for four years. Even the last case went in his favour just few days before his death.

During the first decade of 19th century, sharp differences started emerging between moderates and extremists in the Congress. The resolutions on Boycott and Swadeshi in the subjects committee provoked violence scenes of disagreement between the moderates and extremists. Tilak got victory in gaining the emphatic declaration that boycott movement was and is legitimate but the qualifying class ‘as started in Bengal’^{xx} gave it an ambiguous scope, both parties satisfied themselves with their interpretation. In 1905 when the partition of Bengal took place, the people of Bengal rose as one man to fight the partition. October 16, 1905 was observed as a day of mourning. People walked barefoot. They tide ‘Rakhi’ to each other’s wrist as a symbol of fraternity. Bengal’s cause soon became India’s cause and the movement was launched with four-fold program of Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education and Swaraj. Tilak wrote on August 22 in the Kesari, “It appears that many people have not yet grasp the full significance of

the Boycott movement. Such measures are absolutely necessary especially when there is a struggle going on between a people and their alien rulers".^{xxi} Tilak himself used only Swadeshi goods for his personal and household. He always used Swadeshi paper for his press and when that was not available to buy non-British paper. He helped enterprising young men to start cottage industries. He lent his full support 'Paisa Fund movement'.^{xxii} It was started in 1903 with a view to collecting one pice from each person. He took lead in establishing the Bombay Swadeshi co-operative stores in 1906. He was on its first board of directors along with Sri Ratan Tata and Manmohandas Ram ji. His famous quote, 'Swaraj is my birth right, I shall have it'^{xxiii} echoed throughout the nation. During this period the Lal-Bal-Pal trio popularised a new slogan 'Militancy- not Mendicancy'. The 'Englishman' wrote, "Many prominent Marwadi firms have been absolutely ruined and a number of the biggest European import houses have either to close down their branches or to put a very small business".^{xxiv} In 1906 Tilak wrote, "We are not armed and there is no necessity for arms either. We have a stronger weapon, a political weapon in boycott, the whole of the administration which is conducted by a handful of English men is carried on with our assistance. We are willing instruments of our own operation. Englishmen knew that they are only a handful in this country and it is the business of every one of them to fool you into believing that they are strong and you are weak. If you have not the power of active resistance, have you not the power of self-denial or self-abstinence so as not to assist the foreign government to rule over you? This is boycott and this is what is meant when we say boycott is a political weapon."^{xxv} He defined national education as that which enable us to know the nation. The schools and colleges failed to do. In America, the declaration of independence was taught to the students in schools. Indian students did not know that six crores of rupees are drained out of this country every year for sugar. Tilak was an advocate of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction as also of religious education which would promote toleration and respect for each other's faith. Tilak also took the lead in proposing that Hindi written in the Devnagari script should be the national language of India. He said that if you want to draw a nation together there is no force more powerful than a common language.

The differences in moderates and extremists ultimately resulted in a split at Surat Congress on March 29, 1907. It was assumed that there is an attempt to convert the Congress into a moderate organisation and to exclude the extremists from it. In June 1908 the Explosive Substances Act and the Newspaper Act were passed. While the government took no action against Anglo Indian newspapers, the editors of the nationalist newspapers were awarded sentences on one charge or the other. Tilak was arrested on June 24, 1908 for writing an article in the 'Kesari' title- 'The Country's Misfortune.' Later on, another charge was made regarding his article 'These Remedies are not Lasting'.^{xxvi} The historic trial started on July 13. Tilak replied that "It is not sedition to find fault with the government or to advocate the reform of administration. it is one's inherent right to fight for the liberty of his people for a change in the government."^{xxvii} He asked the jury to distinguish between the bureaucracy and the government. At last, the verdict was announced against Tilak sentencing him for Six-year imprisonment. Tilak stated in the court, "All I wish to say is that in spite of the verdict of the jury, I maintain that I am

innocent. There are higher powers that rule the destiny of things and it may be the will of Providence that the cause which I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free".^{xxviii} Strong reactions were there across the country. In Bombay most of the mills did not open. There was six days of strike, one for every year of Tilak sentence. In the violence that erupted, 14 persons were killed and 30 wounded. Unofficial figures were 30 dead and 100 wounded. The press also joined the protest. Government took decision to deport him to Burma. Tilak reached Rangoon on September 22 and the next morning he reached Mandalay where he spent the next six years of his life. The cell in which he was kept was a wooden cage of 20x12 feet. In summer it was a veritable furnace while in winter it was bitter cold that the wooden structure failed to shut out the biting wind. Tilak busied himself into a routine of reading and thinking. His books included the works by Kant, Darwin, Hume, Hegel, Rousseau, Max Mueller etc. In the jail, he studied Pali, French and German. The most fruitful result of his constant reading was that he wrote a book 'Geeta Rahasya'^{xxix} in 1911. In June, 1914 he was set free and reached at Pune on June 16.

Tilak wanted unity between the moderates and the extremists. But both have gone so far from each other. Aurbindo Ghosh wrote, "A hush had fallen over the country. no man seems to know which way to move and from all sides came the questions, what shall we do? what is there we can do? what next?"^{xxx} Britain declared India's participation in first World War on August 4, 1914. Tilak's view was that England's difficulty was India's opportunity and he started preparations for popularising Home Rule Movement. Tilak had three-point formula; unity in the Congress, reorganising the nationalist party and forming the Home Rule League. The main hurdle in the path of unity lay in the restrictions imposed on the organisations which then elected delegates to the Congress. The moderate leaders of the Congress lead by Feroz Shah Mehta and Gokhale resisted Tilak's attempt to rejoin the Congress. Tilak wrote in the Kesari, "The National Congress belongs to the nation. It is neither Tilak's nor Gokhale's property. It is the Congress itself which will decide its own policy not any one individual. Every congressman has a right to place his views before the Congress to persuade the majority to adopt those views and so long as they are lawful and constitutional they cannot be shut out or supress."^{xxxi} Gokhale died in 1915 and later on Feroz Shah Mehta too passed away. After that the Congress constitution was amended so that the nationalist could be elected by public meetings convened under the auspices of any association which was of two years standing and which had for one of its objects the attainment of self-government within the British Empire by constitutional means. It was welcomed by Tilak. At Bombay provincial conference a compromise was held between the moderates and the extremists. At this time Tilak started working for Home Rule Movement and visited many places in India. Mrs. Annie Besant also started a parallel Home Rule League in Madras. However, in 1917, Punjab government served an order under the 'Defence of India Act' prohibiting Tilak's entry into Punjab. In July, 1918 Montford report was published Tilak reacted on this report saying that "That is Dawn but where is the Sun?"^{xxxii} He further observed, "The report is a beautiful, very skilful and statesman like document. We asked for eight annas of self-

government, the report gives us one Anna of responsible government and tries to tell us that it is more precious than eight annas of self-government".^{xxxiii}

In 1918, Tilak went to Britain to fight the case against Sir Valentine Chirol against whom he had filed a suit for making comments on his character way back in 1910. Tilak's case was put forward by Sir John Simon while Chirol's case was defended by Sir Edward Carson. Unfortunately, Tilak lost the case and he had to bear a lot of financial burden due to this. Regarding this, Gandhi Ji said, "As a matter-of-fact Tilak has risen higher than ever in the peoples, mind because of the adverse verdict. The fact is that the longer purse has won. One must admire the Lokmanya's tenacity and courage. Undaunted by the legal defeat, he is carrying on national work in England. When he is engaged in fighting over battles over there, it is our duty here to collect funds and relieve him of the financial worry."^{xxxiv} In 1919 Congress decided to launch Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. Earlier the date was fixed March 30 but later on it was changed to April 6. However, Delhi observed hartal on March 30 and there was shooting and killing by the police to disperse a procession led by Swami Shraddhanand. On April 13, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh took place in which 379 persons were killed and over 1000 wounded. Tilak landed at Bombay on November 27 and got a rousing welcome. About the non-cooperation movement he told Gandhi that "I like the program well enough. But I have my doubts as to the country being with us in the self-denying ordinances presents to the people. I will do nothing to hinder the progress of the movement. I wish you very success and if you gain the popular ear you will find in me and enthusiastic supporter."^{xxxv} On May 22, 1920 a pleasant incident happened in his political career when he was given Rs. 3,25,000/- at Pune regarding his expenses of the Chirol case. He was moved by this public affection and said "By your generosity, you have literally bought my body and soul".^{xxxvi}

In July 1920 Tilak suffered an attack of malaria and developed fever. His 64th birthday was celebrated in bed. On July 26, the fever took a serious turn and new complications emerged. From July 29 he started getting attacks of Angina Pectoris and breathed his last on August 1, 1920. Jawaharlal Nehru who was present at Bombay said, "The whole of Bombay's million population seemed to have poured out to do reverence to the great leader whom they have loved so well."^{xxxvii} Gandhi ji said, "It is difficult to believe that Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak as dead. He was so much part of the people. No man of our Times had the hold on the masses that he had. The devotion that he commanded from thousands of his countrymen was extraordinary. He was the idol of the people. His word was law among thousands. A giant among men has fallen. The voice of a lion is hushed. What was the reason of his hold on his country man? I think the answer is simple. His patriotism was a passion with him. He knew no religion but love of his country. He was a born democrat.....he will go down to the generations yet unborn as a maker of modern India. They will revere his memory as of a man who lived for them and died for them."^{xxxviii}

Conclusions: Bal Gangadhar Tilak was an epitome of discipline and hard work. His life was full of struggle and sacrifice. Imprisonment did not deter his bow to work for national interests. He was one of the earlier leaders who roused public opinion for national ends. He was a scholar,

thinker and philosopher, all in one. Freedom from colonial rule was his passion. He made the people realise of the consequences of slavery and shaped their sentiments to achieve the goal of freedom though twenty-seven years after his demise. Valentine Chirol calls him 'father of Indian Unrest' while Indians call him 'father of Indian Nationalism'.

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