

Balagangadhar Tilak

M. Venkata Ramana Rao

M.A., M.Ed., Lecturer in History, N.G.Govt. College, Telangana State, Nalgonda-508001.

INTRODUCTION:

Bal Gandadhar Tilak was a nationalist, social reformer and freedom fighter of India. He was also one of the popular leader of the Indian Independence Movement.

Tilak was a brilliant politician as well as a profound scholar who believed that independence is the foremost necessity for the well being of a nation and that to win it through extreme measures should not be dispensed with. He was the first intellectual leader to understand the importance of mass support, and subsequently became the first mass leader of India.

His famous quote '*Swaraj is my birth right, and I shall have it*' is very popular and well – remembered in India even today. Popularly known as Lokamanya Bal Gandhgar Tilak, he was a scholar of Indian history, Sanskrit, Hinduism, Mathematics and Astronomy. The word '*Lokamanya*' means – beloved of the people.

He was among the founders of the new English School, Pune of which Prof. Chiplunkar became the Principal. He had a genius for organisation and with Agarkar, the then foremost social reformer, started the newspapers '*Kesari*' and "*The Maratha*" in 1881.

EARLY LIFE :

Bal Gandhgar Tilak was born on July 23, 1856, in a village near Ratnagiri, Maharashtra, into a middle class Chitpavan brahmin family. He was an intelligent student with a special aptitude for Mathematics.

Tilak's father Gangadhar Ramachandra Tilak was a Sanskrit scholar and a famous teacher. Because of scholarship, he had become Gangadharpanth to every one.

As a student Tilak, learnt all the lessons at home and there was nothing left to learn at school.

Though Tilak, was very intelligent, he was not his teacher's favourite because of his mischievousness. From his childhood, he used to form independent views. He always took an independent stand. He was very much different from the other boys of his age.

He liked stories very much. Soon after his studies, he would run to his grandfather to hear stories from him.

His grandfather had lived in Kashi during the days of the revolution in 1857, the first war of Independence. On hearing the stories about the revolutionaries like Nana Saheb Tatya and Rani of Jhansi, Tilak would be thrilled.

TILAK IN CONGRESS:

In 1890, Tilak joined the Indian National Congress. But, soon fell into opposition of its liberal-moderate attitude towards the fight for self- government.

He opposed the moderate views of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and was supported by fellow Indian Nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab.

In 1907, during its convention at Surat in Gujarat, the Congress Party split into the Garam Dal led by Tilak, Pal and Lajpat Rai, and the Naram Dal led by Gokhale.

Tilak was arrested in 1906 on charges of sedition. The British court convicted him and he was imprisoned from 1908 to 1914 in Mandalay, Burma.

Tilak was released in 1914. Then, he re-united with his fellow nationalists and re-joined the Indian National Congress in 1916. He also cooperated to found the All India Home Rule League in 1916-18 with Annie Besant and Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

TILAK IN JAIL

Tilak's writings landed him in jail thrice. The first time was for having Published the facts about the way the government had illtreated the Maharaja of Kolhapur.

The second time was in 1897 following the publication of an article and poem in his paper 'Kesari' condemning the unjust and immoral acts of a reckless and indifferent government during the 1896 famine and plague.

In 1907 at the Surat Congress, the trio – Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal – Popularly known as 'Lal, Bal and Pal', besides advocating Swadeshi movement also called for total boycott (non cooperation and non –payment of taxes).

Tilak's might was such that the British government was intimidated by him. Having realised Tilak's hold over the masses, the government felt threatened and kept looking for opportunities to keep him out of action.

Tilak was kept there in isolation. 'Gita Rahasya', a vital commentary on the Gita was written by Tilak while he was imprisoned there. It was Tilak, who through his own example, gave prestige to imprisonment during the freedom struggle. He also utilised this period to learn German and French.

Satyabhama, his wife at the age of 45 year, passed away when he was in Mandalay prison, with a deep and unfulfilled yearning to see him one last time.

SWARAJ:

Bal Gangadhar Tilak thundered the call " Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it".

For Tilak, Swaraj was not freedom from all restraint but it is a complete disciplined rule from within. It is the freedom to err and power to correct them.

Swaraj was not and an isolated independence, but healthy, positive and dignified independence. The sense of duty and enlightened use of power 'makes the state, an embodiment of equality and justice. As days passed, Tilak began to inculcate the slogan 'Swaraj is our birth right' into the minds of every Indian. Lokamanya Tilak's popularity grew rapidly.

GANESH FESTIVAL AND SHIVAJI UTSAV:

In order to inspire the common man he stated these two festivals which were celebrated by the people of all castes and creeds. There are many festive days and different festivals in the Hindu religion, but they are celebrated individually and privately. For national awakening Tilak initiated Ganeshotsav and Shivaji Utsav in 1894.

Shivaji Utsav started on fort Raigad in 1894 and reached as far as Japan by 1905. In 1896 Ganeshotsav attained national importance.

TILAK AS AUTHOR:

Later, in 1903, he wrote the much more speculative '*Arctic Home*' in the Vedas. In it he argued that the Vedas could only have been composed in the Arctics, and the aryan bards brought them south after the onset of the last Ice Age.

Tilak also authored '*Geetarahasya*' in Marathi, and when his friends asked him why he did not write in English, he replied that it is not a piece of research, but was written for the common man who should imbibe the karma yoga as interpreted by him.

More over, he said that the people in the western world are already practising karma yoga and that is why they have prospered; hence they need not be taught it.

When the book was first published in 1915, the first edition of six thousand copies was sold like hot cakes and there were queues outside the Kesari office in Gaikwad Wada.

CONCLUSION:

Till he reached the age of 60, the health condition of Lokamanya had become very weak. The body was tired and yet, he undertook tours to awaken the people. He visited Sangli, Hyderabad, Karachi, Solapur and Kashi and lectured at all these places. Finally, he aimed for Bombay, and came to the city with great enthusiasm.

In the Early hours of 1920 August 1, the light of his life went out. As this sad news was spreading, a veritable ocean of people surged to his house to have the last glimpse of their beloved leader.

Around two lakhs of people witnessed his last journey. Mahatma Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shaukat Ali turns. Gandhi Called Bal Gangadhar Tilak "*The Maker of Modern India*".

Tilak is also today considered the father of Hindu Nationalism. He was the idol of Indian Revolutionary, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.