



BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

Patriot and scholar, Bal Gangadhar Tilak knew no religion but believed in the unity of the country. His life was a saga of suffering and sacrifice for the sake of his country. He knew no respite from the lifelong battle he waged against the foreign ruler. He had famously declared, “Swaraj is my birth-right and I will have it”. This one statement had a ripple effect on the collective subconscious of Indian people.

Lokmanya Tilak was born on July 23, 1856 in Ratnagiri. He was the son of Gangadhar Pant and Parvatibai. ‘Bal’ was the loving name given to him by his mother that remained with him. He had his early education at Poona (Pune) city school and then, Deccan College. He also received the L.L.B. degree in 1879. In the meantime, he got married to Tapibai in 1871.

Tilak’s public life began as a teacher at New English School, Pune. The school was started by himself along with Vishnu Shastri. Lokmanya Tilak soon turned to Journalism and in 1881 started the English weekly Mahratta and Marathi weekly Kesari which he edited jointly with Agarkar. He was extremely proficient in subjects like religion, law and politics. His open and direct writing did not go down well with British authorities who sentenced him to a jail term on charge of defamation.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak started an arts college following the formation of Deccan Education society in 1885. Tilak attended the Bombay session of the Congress in 1889 as a representative of Pune. It was at this session that the trio, Lokmanya Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and B.C.Pal, popularly known as trio of Lal-Bal-Pal met. He attended the subsequent sessions of the Congress until the split between the moderates and extremists at the Surat session took place in 1907. Meanwhile he was also elected to the Bombay legislative Council in 1885 and 1887.

Tilak was arrested for sedition again, the main charge being that he attempted to excite feelings of disaffection to the government established by law in British India. He was sent to Mandalay jail in Burma, where he wrote his immortal commentary ‘Gita Rahasya’ on the Bhagvad Gita. In 1916, he started Home Rule League, which sought self rule. He also wrote ‘Arctic Home in the Vedas’ in 1903.

Lokmanya Tilak is credited to popularize Ganesha worship and Shivaji Jayanti as a social festival to unite the countrymen. He opposed the Age Of Consent Bill, terming it an act of interference with the Hinduism although he personally was against the child marriage. Tilak left for London to fight his case against Sir Valentine Chirol for defamation in his book ‘Indian Unrest’.

Tilak was chosen for the Presidentship of Congress in 1920. On July 28, 1920, Gandhiji announced the launching of the non-cooperation movement. On the same day the movement was to begin, Tilak passed away after a severe attack of Malaria. Among the bearers of the bier that carried this great son of India in his final journey, were Gandhiji, Maulana Shaukat Ali and Dr. Kitchlew.

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