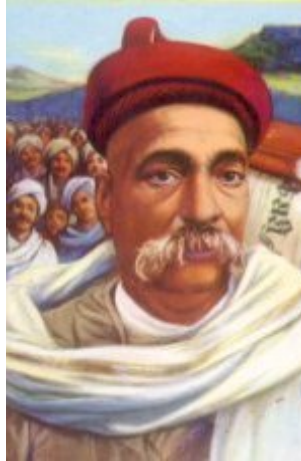


## **Bal Gangadhar Tilak**



"If 5 sheep eat up all the grass in a meadow in 28 days, how many sheep will eat up the grass in 20 days?"

"Seven sheep, sir," flashed back the answer even before the teacher finished his question.

"Who is it that answered without working out the sum?"  
Thundered the teacher.

Two or three voices shouted, "Bal, sir."

The teacher went near Bal. He took his note book and glanced through it. Should he not at least take down the problem, let alone work it out?

"Where have you worked the sum?"

Bal, with a mischievous smile, pointed to his head with his index finger.

"You should work the problem in your book," the teacher said.

"Why? I will do it orally," replied Bal.

Bal's classmates found it difficult to understand certain problems even when the teacher did them thrice. But, to Bal

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mathematics was as easy as drinking Water. Sanskrit, of course, was like peeled banana to him!

Intelligent But Mischievous.

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

Bal learnt all the lessons at home and there was nothing left to learn at school.

Though Bal was very intelligent, he was not his teachers' favorite because of his mischievousness. From his childhood, he used to form independent views. He took an independent stand always. He was very much different from boys of his age.

Those were the days of his schooling in the primary school at Ratnagiri.

One afternoon the teacher entered the class after the interval and found groundnut shells scattered in the classroom. Naturally he grew angry. He took his cane and asked, "Who scattered the groundnut shells like this?"

There was silence. The teacher's anger rose.

"Speak, who ate the groundnuts?" No one confessed. The teacher lost his temper. He decided to punish the entire class. He began to give each boy two cuts with his cane. When Bal's turn came, he did not hold out his hand." I did not eat the groundnuts. So I will not receive the cuts."

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"Then who ate the groundnuts?" "It is said that carrying tales is bad. So I won't tell."

Bal's straightforwardness and truthfulness made the teacher himself uncomfortable.

He became angry, too. He sent him out of the school. And Bal's father Gangadharpant received a complaint against his son.

Next day, the father brought Bal to the school. He said that what his son had said was true. Bal was not in the habit of eating anything outside his home and he, the father, never gave his son money to buy anything.

Even at that young age it was Tilak's nature to protest against injustice.

Bal 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 1857 Revolution (the first war of Independence). On hearing the stories about the revolutionaries like Nana Saheb, Tatia Tope and Jhansi Rani, Bal would be thrilled.

Oh! What great men were they, who sacrificed their lives for the country! When he grew up he, too, should serve his country like them and free Mother India from slavery this became his heart's desire.

Bal was ten years old when Gangadharpant was transferred to Pune. Coming from Ratnagiri to Pune was a milestone in the life of Bal Tilak.

A new place and new people.

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By joining the Anglo-Vernacular School in Pune, young Tilak was able to get good education from well known teachers.

Bal's mother passed away only a few months after coming to Pune. Fasts and strict religious observances had made her weak and thin. She wished for a son, and undertook a strenuous form of the worship of the Sun God for eighteen months. The boy who was born by the grace of the Sun God, was instrumental in making the sunset in the British Empire!

Bal lost his father also six years after his mothers death. Then he was 16 years old.

He was studying in the Matriculation Class. He had been married to a ten-year old girl called Sathyabhama.

Naturally one's responsibility increases after marriage. Now Bal Tilak became 'Bal Gangadhar Tilak'. After passing the Matriculation Examination he joined the Deccan College.

His health was delicate as his mothers. How could he sacrifice his life for the country if his body was weak? So, Tilak decided to improve his physique even at the cost of his studies during the first year at college.

He used to do physical exercises every day. And his food was regulated but nutritious.

In the course of one year, Tilak was first in all games and sports. He became an expert swimmer and wrestler. He developed his body so well that all wondered at such radiant health.

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In 1877, Tilak got his B.A. degree. It was no wonder that he got first class marks in mathematics. He continued his studies and got the LL.B. degree also.

Tilak, being a double graduate, could easily have got a wellpaid job like others, under the British. But, as he had decided when he was young, he dedicated himself to the service of his country.

The concept of Swaraj had yet to blossom in the minds of the people. They had to be made to feel that thirst for independence. Patriotism had to be nurtured. To lay a strong foundation for a new way of life, an educational institution reflecting Indian culture had to be established. Every Indian had to be taught about Indian culture and national ideals. Good citizens can be molded only through good education. Such were the views of ' Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

His classmate Agarkar gave him full support. As Tilak and Agarkar were working out the plans for a system of education which would make students truly useful to the country, another great person, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, joined them.

Chiplunkar, himself a teacher, wished that at least the younger generations should receive the right type of education.

The people's blind faith that British rule was God's gift to India had to be wiped out.

Tilak, Agarkar and Chiplunkar were three persons impelled by the same ideal. They joined hands to create an educational institution to develop moral strength in the pupils.

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The educational institution planned and founded by Tilak is like a banyan tree. The little seedling planted by him, has grown into a gigantic tree with many branches, and every branch has meant renewed life and a new educational institution.

The New English School has now grown into the 'Deccan Education Society'. This society now runs the Fergusson College and the Greater Maharashtra Commerce and Economics College in Pune, the Willingdon College in Sangli and the Bombay College in Bombay as well as a number of high schools.

As the New English School started in 1880, progressed, it attracted larger and still larger numbers of pupils. This was a school which reflected out culture and the ideals of our life and was thus our very own. It was also securing the best results in the examinations. Teachers were so preparing their pupils for the examinations as to secure all the scholarships for their school. Tilak and his colleagues toiled not a little for the school. During the first year, neither Tilak nor Chiplunkar drew even a rupee as salary.

Now, Tilak thought of expanding the field of national education. The school imparted education only to the students. It was necessary to bring home to the mind of every Indian the nature of the slavery of Indians. People had to be organized and the people had to be roused to their condition and duty. Tilak thought that the newspapers were the most effective media.

The very next year after the school was started, Tilak started two weeklies. 'Kesari' was the Marathi Weekly and 'Mahratta' was the English Weekly.

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The newspapers attracted the people. In just two years 'Kesari' had more readers than any Indian language paper. The editorials gave a vivid picture of the people's sufferings and of actual happenings. They called upon every Indian to fight for his right. The language was so sharp as to create in the most cowardly reader the thirst for freedom. Tilak used to say to his colleagues: "You are not writing for the university students. Imagine you are talking to a villager..... Be sure of your facts. Let your words be clear as day light."

After the death of Rajaram, Maharaja of Kolhapur State, his adopted son Shivaji Rao became the Maharaja. 'Kesari' published articles condemning the cruel way in which the British treated him. When the people came to know of the tyranny of the British, unrest gripped Pune and Kolhapur. The Government filed a case against 'Kesari' (for publishing the facts!). The young editors Agarkar and Tilak were sentenced to 4 months' rigorous imprisonment. Tilak went to the prison with his friend Agarkar.

As the New English School was progressing well, Fergusson College and Deccan Education Society were established. Tilak made a rule that no one should expect more than seventy-five rupees a month as his salary. But other members of the management opposed this. When differences of opinion on this issue became endless, Tilak made over to others the institution he himself had founded.

Tilak was filled with immense grief, when he had to resign from the institution which he had started and for which he had toiled day and night for ten years.

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The weeklies 'Kesari' and 'Maharatta' also brought no profit. Tilak had to find part time work to maintain his family. Never would he work under the British. He started classes to coach students for the Pleaders, Examination.

The period seven years between 1890, when Tilak left the educational field, and 1897, when he was imprisoned, was very significant in the life of Tilak. During this period, Tilak the Teacher became Tilak the Politician. The director of an institution became a national leader.

The exceptional energy, so far hidden in him, now raced forth in many directions. In seven brief years, he acquired the experience of seventy years. In addition to the two weeklies, he was running classes for students of Law. He actually waged a war against the Government for the sake 'of social reforms. He issued a call for the banning of child marriage and welcomed widow marriage. Through the celebrations of Ganapathi Festival and the birthday of the Shivaji he organized people. He was a member of the Municipal Council of Pune, a member of the Bombay Legislature, and an elected 'Fellow' of the Bombay University, He was also taking a leading part in the Congress sessions. Added to these, he wrote and published his maiden work 'Orion'.

Such were Tilak's achievements in this brief span of seven years.

That Tilak managed to transform the local festivities of Ganesha and Shivaji into national festivals, is proof of his organizing ability and shrewdness. If people are to feel in their very blood and

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bones that they are all one, they should meet often; they should have common ideals and there should be occasions, when they can 'forget all other differences and mingle together joyously. Tilak's plan made these festivities spread to every nook and corner of Maharashtra in a few years.

In 1896, famine broke out in India. Tilak pressed the government to relieve the distress of the people at once.

He helped the farmers affected by the famine. He collected information about the conditions in every district and published it in the 'Mahratta' and the 'Kesari'.

Plague broke out while the people were still in the grip of famine. Tilak opened some hospitals and, with the help of volunteers, looked after the patients.

Though the people were in the grip of famine and plague, the government was indifferent. The Viceroy himself said that there was no cause for anxiety. He also said that there was no need to start a 'Famine Relief Fund'. Revenue collection went on as usual. The government's indifference was severely criticized in the articles published in Tilak's papers. They published fearlessly reports about the havoc caused by famine and plague and government's utter irresponsibility and indifference. In the editorials, Tilak made appeals to the people and gave them advice. He explained to them the 'Famine Relief Act'. He exhorted them to demand relief from the government as their right. "Are you cowards even while you are dying? Can't you gather courage?" So he questioned the people. He

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gave constructive suggestions to the government to arrest the plague.

The government made preparations to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign. On one side, people were busy cremating the victims of the plague; on the other side, the governments were busy making arrangements for the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations!

At last, the government appointed a Special Plague Officer to arrest the havoc of the plague. His name was Rand and he was more terrible than the plague itself. He sent armed soldiers to make the people vacate the houses which plague had entered.

The soldiers forcibly entered the houses and terrified the people with their guns. They admitted to the hospitals someone they could catch no matter whether he was suffering from plague or not. They took the remaining members of the family to distant camps; they burnt all their belongings on the assumption that they carded the infection.

Rand Sahib became a worse plague than the plague itself.

But, in his own hospital, Tilak was toiling day and night to save the lives of plague- affected people.

'Has The Government Gone Mad?'

A youth, enraged by the senselessness of the government's anti-plague measures, shot the Special Plague Officer Rand dead. The police reacted violently and acts of injustice and cruelty multiplied.

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Tilak's blood boiled.

Under the title "Has the Government gone mad?" Tilak condemned in the 'Kesari' the immoral acts of the government.

Tilak's pungent writings made the government tremble. The government came to the conclusion that if Tilak was free it could not survive. By some means or the other Tilak must be locked up behind the bars.

The government suspected that Tilak might have had a hand in Rand's murder! It took objection to a poem and an article on Shivaji published in the 'Kesari', and imprisoned Tilak in 1897.

Tilak was charged with writing articles instigating people to rise against the government and to break the laws and disturb the peace. He was sentenced to a year and a half's rigorous imprisonment.

The cells in the jails in those days were actual, hell.

The dark cell measured just 13 square feet, and the prisoner could not even turn from one side to another. The blanket was full of worms. Mosquitoes were innumerable. The bugs in the bed sucked the prisoners' blood as if to prevent the mosquitoes from flying away with the prisoner. The bread was mixed with sand. The clothes were coarse. Officers whipped the prisoners and mercilessly set them to work.

Tilak had to make rope and mats from coir and his fingers got blisters. The fingers that wrote 'Orion', which won praise from great scholars like Max Muller, were made to do dreadful tasks which made them bleed. Tilak lost 30 pounds in weight in just four months.

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In the little leisure he had he read and wrote. His book 'The Arctic Home in the Vedas' written in the jail, is a priceless work.

Scholars and statesmen from all over the world appealed to the government to release Tilak. The government insisted on two conditions to release him: he should not attend any reception arranged in his honor and he should not criticize the government. Tilak was ready to accept the first condition as he did not desire anything for himself. But he would rather live as an outlaw in the Andamans than live as a coward in Maharashtra, admitting that he had done something wrong when he had not done so. So he rejected the second condition. Finally the government reduced his sentence from one and a half years to a year.

It was Deepavali in 1898; Tilak was released from jail. The joy of the people was beyond words. There were illuminations and fireworks everywhere. There was a heavy rush of people to have 'darshan' of Tilak. He was taken in a procession through the main streets of Pune.

People shed tears of joy. Mothers and children worshipped Tilak's portrait in their homes by lighting incense and camphor.

Tilak, who was a regional leader, now became the national leader. Every Indian's heart was filled with reverence for Tilak.

His sufferings in the jail had made him very weak. His eyes were sunken and the bones in the cheeks protruded. But after his release in a few days his health improved.

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At this time, the 'Swadeshi' movement grew intense. (This was a movement for "boycott of goods made in other countries.) Gokhale, Ranade, Paranjape and others had shown the importance of the swadeshi principle. Through newspapers and lectures, Tilak spread the message to each and every village in Maharashtra. A big 'Swadeshi Market' was opened in front of Tilak's house. Swadeshi goods were sold in the fifty odd stalls of the market.

The slogan of swadeshi was heard every where. Foreign clothes were reduced to ashes. Foreign sugar was thrown away and local Jaggery was used. Swadeshi cotton mills, paper mills and factories to manufacture matches were started.

The students of Rajaram College, Kolhapur, were to take an examination. They tore the blank books given to them, saying they would not use foreign-made paper. These students were given six lashes each as punishment. And they pleaded that they should be beaten only with a local made cane!

'Swadeshi, Swaraj (self-rule), Boycott and National Education'- these were the sacred words preached by Tilak. And the people made weapons of these words. The tendency grew in Indians to defy slavery. Galvanizing people's love of their country was itself a revolution brought about by Tilak.

Fourteen years later Gandhiji started the non-cooperation movement against the British. The methods he placed before the people, Tilak had formulated as early as in 1906!

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During this time, the Government of India and some British newspapers harassed Tilak in many ways. A rich man, Baba Maharaj by name, had died. He had expressed the wish that Tilak should look after his property. So Tilak took charge of it. Baba Maharaj's wife was misled by some selfish persons. She complained against Tilak to the government. The government was waiting for an opportunity to crush a leader who had been fighting against it. It appointed special officers and held a mock trial; it decided that Tilak had tendered false evidence and was also guilty of forgery. He was handcuffed like thieves and murderers and sent to prison. Tilak, after coming out of the jail on bail, fought for fourteen years in different courts and finally got justice from the privy Council in England. The Privy Council rebuked severely the courts in India for the way they had tried this case.

The 'Globe' of London and 'The Times of India' had written that Tilak incited people to commit murders. Tilak did not rest till he made those papers apologize to him.

The British divided Bengal. Then the people of Bengal used boycott itself as powerful weapon. A powerful movement flared up to protest against the division of Bengal. There was a District Magistrate who was the embodiment of injustice. A revolutionary by name Khudiram Bose threw a bomb on him.

The government used very harsh methods to break the will of the people. Aurobindo was arrested and taken to the police office in iron handcuffs, with a rope tied to his waist. Any one suspected of trying to use explosives could be sent to prison for 14 years!

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Such atrocities made the people revolt against the government. Tilak's blood boiled. He wrote an article in the 'Kesari' under the title 'The Country's Misfortune' and took the government to task:

'It is unfortunate that bombs are being made in the country. But the responsibility for creating a situation, in which it has become necessary to throw bombs, rests solely on the government. This is due to the government's unjust rule.'

The British were like a pricked balloon. They concluded that their government would be in danger if Tilak remained free.

The government made this article 'The Country's Misfortune', a pretext to charge Tilak with treason against the government. Tilak was arrested on 24th June 1908 in Bombay. He was sentenced to six year's imprisonment outside India.

Tilak was then 52 years old. He had plunged into the struggle for freedom with no thought for his health and had grown weak. Diabetes had further weakened him. How could he withstand this severe imprisonment for six years far away from India?

The country was plunged in grief. Even foreign thinkers condemned this severe punishment to Tilak, who was a scholar, highly respected and honored throughout the world.

The prison in Mandalay, Burma; a small room made of wooden planks; inside, a cot, a table, a chair and a bookshelf this was Tilak's room. There was no protection from wind and cold. And he was cut off from other men.

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By the time Tilak completed one year in this jail, he got a note through one of his friends. The note said that if he accepted certain conditions, then he would be released. Tilak wrote back saying, 'I am now 53 years old. If I live for another ten Years, that means I shall live for five years after I come out of the prison. I can at least spend those five years in the service of the people. If I accept government's conditions, I am as good dead'.

The rigorous imprisonment was reduced to simple imprisonment. So he was allowed to read and write. It was here that he wrote the book 'Gita-Rahasya'. It is a mighty work.

Tilak wished to forget his loneliness and so was always immersed in reading and writing. By the time his term of six years in the jail was over, he had collected about 400 books. He learnt in the prison, German and French languages with the help of 'Teach Yourself, guides.

He returned to his old daily routine, which he had given up for want of time. Every morning he used to pray to God, chant hymns like the Gayathri Manthra and perform religious rites; then, he would read and write.

Tilak's, wife passed away in India when he was still rotting in the jail in Mandalay.

Tilak was released on 8th June 1914. He was brought to Pune on the 16th and was let off. Many organizations in Pune arranged public meetings in honor of Tilak. Tilak said.

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"Six years of separation from you has not lessened my affection for you. I have not forgotten the concept of swaraj. There will be no change in the programs I had already accepted. They will all continue as before."

By the time Tilak returned from Mandalay, there was a serious rift between the two Congress groups. His efforts to unite them were in vain. Then Tilak decided to build a separate powerful organization called the 'Home Rule League'. Its goal was swaraj.

Tilak went from village to village, explained the aim of his league to the farmers and won their hearts.

'Home Rule' means that we ourselves should manage our homes. Should our neighbors become the master of our house? An Indian should have as much freedom in India as an Englishman has in England. This is the meaning of 'Home Rule' - so Tilak explained.

He travelled constantly, in order to organize the people. He spoke from hundreds of platforms about 'Home Rule'. And wherever he went he received a hero's welcome.

After his visit to Lucknow, he came to Kanpur.

'Swaraj -- Our Birth-Right' "We want equality. We cannot remain slaves under foreign rule. We will not carry for an instant longer, the yoke of slavery that we have carded all these years. Swaraj is our birth right. We must have it at any cost. When the Japanese, who are Asians like us, are free, why should we be slaves? Why should our Mother's hands be handcuffed?"

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Swaraj's alter blazed. The government was again alarmed and troubled.

As days passed, Tilak began to stamp the slogan 'Swaraj is our birthright' on the minds of every Indian. Lokamanya Tilak's popularity grew rapidly.

In 1916, Tilak completed sixty years of a fruitful life. Scholars, leaders and friends thronged his house on the occasion of the sixtieth birthday celebrations.

Tilak was honored with the presentation of an Address of Felicitations and a purse of one lakh rupees. The celebrations were on a grand scale. The Lokamanya gave away the money to be used in the service of the country.

The government also gave him a present on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday! On the day before his birthday, the government served him with a notice; it ordered him to give a surety of Rs. 20000, for his good behavior for one year!

His body gradually grew weaker. His talks and writings were not as fiery as before. Yet he successfully tried to unify the divided Congress.

When a journalist of England by name Chirol, visited India, he studied the movement directed by Tilak and made false allegations against Tilak. He charged that 'Tilak was the leader of a violent revolution in India!' Tilak claimed that this was an insult to him and went to court for damages, He had to go to England for the 'Chirol

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episode' and had to remain there for 13 months. On account of this, he had to spend his precious time and money.

It was not solely for this case that Tilak visited England. His purpose also was to explain to the British government conditions in enslaved India. He addressed hundreds of meetings and intensified the 'Home Rule' movement. He won the friendship of leaders of the Labor Party.

In 'the World War, the British sought the help of Indians. Victory in the war intoxicated the British and tyranny was let loose in India.

When the Rowlat Act was opposed, the 'Jailianwala Bagh Massacre' took place. The heartless government murdered in cold blood hundreds of unarmed civilians in a brutal way.

On hearing this, Tilak rushed back to India at once. He issued a call to the Indians not to stop their movement no matter what happened, till their demands were met.

The Lokamanya had become very weak by this time. 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. Later he came of Bombay.

In July 1920, his condition worsened. In the early hours of 1st August, the light went out.

Even as this sad news was spreading, a veritable ocean of people surged to his house to have the last glimpse of their beloved leader. Two lakhs of people witnessed his last journey. Mahatma

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Gandhi, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shaukat Ali and others shouldered the bier by turns.

Tilak's was a magnificent life and he was every way worthy of the people's homage. He led a simple life, and offered himself, body and soul, to the service of his country. Tilak had no property. His clothes were very simple. A dhoti, a shirt, a shawl on the shoulder and a red 'Pagadi' (a Marathi cap) on his head - this was all he wore.

Lokamanya's wife Sathyabhama also was very simple like her husband. She never wore costly dress. She spent all her life in working for the family and in looking after guests. At the time of her death, she longed to see her husband. But that was not to be. Tilak was in the Mandalay jail at that time.

Tilak was born in Ratnagiri on 23rd July 1856. He lived for 64 years. Every year of his life was a milestone of achievements.

How much the British feared Tilak, can be gauged from the letter the Governor of Bombay wrote in 1908 to the Secretary of State for India in England:

'He is one of the chief conspirators opposed to the British rule in India. He may even be the Chief conspirator. He has planned the Ganesha Festival, the Shivaji Festival, the Paisa Fund and the National Schools, with the sole aim of destroying British rule in India.'

When Tilak passed away, Mahatma Gandhi said: "He used his steel-like will power for the country. His life is an open book. The Lokamanya is the Architect of New India. Future generations will

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remember Tilak with reverence, as the man who lived and died for their sake."

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