



Bal Gangadhar Tilak was an Indian nationalist, journalist, teacher, social reformer, lawyer, and popular leader of the Indian Independence Movement. Read to know about his brave life.

Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak was an important leader of the **Indian Independence movement** who transformed the struggle for freedom. Tilak was one of the early nationalists who changed the course of the independence movement by incorporating modern ideologies and tactics in the struggle for freedom.

Keshav Gangadhar Tilak, infamously known as “The father of the Indian unrest” is one of the first leaders who stood for Swaraj or Self-Rule in India. He also popularized the quote “Swarajya is my birthright and I shall have it”.

Mahatma Gandhi had called him “The Maker of Modern India”.

Early life of Bal Gangadhar Tilak

Birth: 23rd July 1856



Tilak was born in a Chitpavan Brahmin family in Ratnagiri (Bombay presidency). His father was a teacher and Sanskrit scholar who died when Tilak was 16 years old.

Tilak married Tapibai (later changed to Satyabhamabai) in 1871.

Education:

In 1877 he obtained his Bachelor of Arts in mathematics from Deccan college of Pune.

He left his M.A course midway to study law (LLB). In 1879 he obtained his LLB degree from government law college, University of Bombay.

After graduating he started teaching mathematics at a private school in Pune, from where he withdrew later and became a journalist.

Tilak the educationist

1880: Tilak co-founded the **New English School** for secondary education



with a few of his associates like Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi, and Vishnushastri Chiplunkar. Their goal was to improve the quality of education for the youth of India.

1884: Deccan Education Society was set up by them to further their goal of educating the youth to make them proficient in English and nationalistic ideology along with Indian culture. Tilak and his associates considered English to be a powerful tool for the dissemination of liberal and democratic ideals.

1885: The society established the **Fergusson college** in Pune for post-secondary studies. Tilak taught Mathematics here for a while.

1890: Tilak resigned from society and joined the newly formed Congress.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak: The Journalist and Politician

Tilak turned his attention to public affairs and started two weekly newspapers to awaken the political consciousness of the people-



- **Kesari** (in Marathi)
- **The Mahratta** (in English)

He wanted to widen the popularity of the nationalist movement which was mostly confined to the upper classes by introducing the Hindu religious symbolism and invoking Maratha sentiments and traditions of the **Maratha** struggle against **Mughals**.

To build **anti-imperialist** sentiments he wrote about celebrating the **Ganapathi festival** and **Shivaji festival** on large scale.

He also started **akharas**, **lathi clubs** for involving youth more, and **anti cow killing societies**.

1897: He was prosecuted for sedition for his writings against the provisions of the **Epidemic act 1897** for tackling the **bubonic plague** that had engulfed the Pune region.

- Tilak had targeted Commissioner Rand, and his writings incited two youth, the **Chapekar brothers**, in **murdering Rand**.



- The trial and sentence of this case earned him the title of “**Lokmanya**” (beloved leader of the people).
- He was sentenced to 18 months in prison, where he developed his **ideas of swaraj** for the first time.

Tilak’s idea of swaraj was gaining popularity and he became a very important extremist leader of congress in the time being.

1905: Viceroy Curzon partitioned Bengal- Tilak strongly opposed this move and supported the Bengali demand for annulment of the act. He advocated for the **boycott of British goods**, which soon became the **Swadeshi movement**.

1906: Tilak put forward a program of **passive resistance**- ‘**Tenets of the new party**’ in front of the Congress-to prepare people to sacrifice to gain independence. This form of resistance was later adopted by Gandhiji against the British,

1907: The moderate leaders did not agree to such political actions which led to the **Surat split** between the moderates and extremists.



The era of extremists (1905-1917)

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal- known as the **Lal, Bal, Pal**- were the extremist leaders whose writings instilled many revolutionary activities in the country.

Leaders like **Aurobindo Ghosh** were also related to them and a few secret societies like **Anushilan Samiti** in Bengal came up during the period.

Tilak through his newspapers wrote criticisms against **British rule** and the **moderate nationalists** who advocated social reforms along western lines and political reforms along constitutional lines.

He was against social reforms through the interference of the British rather, he believed that social reforms should be done after the Indians get to self-rule. This view of him caused him to **oppose the 'age of consent act' of 1891.**

1908: The Surat split of 1907 helped the British government take



advantage of the division and again charged Tilak with **sedition and inciting terrorism.**

- He had defended the actions of **Khudiram Bose** and **Prafulla Chaki** wherein they had tried to assassinate district judge Mr. Kingsford in Bengal using bombs.
- Tilak was deported to **Mandalay, Burma**, to serve a six-year prison sentence.
- The poor conditions of the jail had a bad impact on his health and he was released in 1914.

Tilak's politics had mellowed down after this, which was evident in his support of the British government in **World War I**, he had also given speeches to encourage youth to support British war efforts.

1916: He established the **All India Home rule league** in **Belgaum** with the slogan ***"Swarajya is my birthright and I shall have it"***.

It worked in Maharashtra (except Bombay), the central provinces, Karnataka, and Berar.



He also collaborated with the **Home Rule organization** started by **Annie Besant** in Madras.

He rejoined the Congress in 1916 in the Lucknow session, and his good relation with Mohammed Ali Jinnah led to the historic Lucknow Pact between the Muslim League and Congress.

1918: Tilak visited England as the president of the Indian home rule league and garnered support and good relations of the labour party which was emerging as a major stakeholder in British politics.

Also read: [Lucknow Pact](#)

Tilak vs Chirol (1919)

- Valentine Chirol the editor of London times had published a set of articles in 1910 in a book called '**The Indian unrest**' in which he called Tilak the "**Father of Indian unrest**".
- Tilak filed a defamation court against Chirol in the court of London in 1919- he lost the case. His supporters started a **Tilak purse fund** to



help him fund the expenses of the case.

Death of Bal Gangadhar Tilak

1st August 1920: Tilak passed away on the day of the launching of the **non-cooperation movement**.

Gandhiji started the **Tilak Fund** to pay respects to the contributions and sacrifices of Tilak for the freedom struggle.

Tilak's vision of gaining independence by mass movements, hartals, the boycott of foreign goods, etc was fulfilled under Gandhiji's leadership.

Tilak was one of the earliest leaders to say that Indians should not cooperate with the foreign rule but he never encouraged the use of violence in his speeches even though his writings were explosive.

Writings by Tilak

Tilak continued his writings while he was in the Mandalay jail- he wrote the '**Srimad Bhagavadgita Rahsya**' in which he discarded the orthodox



interpretation of Gita that it taught the ideal of renunciation, instead, in his view, it taught **selfless service to humanity**.

Earlier in **1893**, he had written '**The Orion- Researchers into the Antiquity of the Vedas**' and in **1903** '**The Arctic Home in the Vedas**'.

Both these works were to promote the Hindu culture as the successor to the Vedic religion whose roots he believed are connected to the Aryans who came from the polar north (he pointed out similarities between gods like *Indra and Thor - god of thunder in Norse mythology*).

So he gave the **Aryan migration theory** that is, the Aryans migrated north when the ice age began.

In today's time, Tilak would be called a masterful political economist as he understood the links between culture, economics, and politics and laid the base of the Freedom struggle for India. As a politician, an economist, a lawyer, and a teacher, Tilak was truly the "Maker of Modern India" as Mahatma Gandhi rightly called him.