

LOKAMANYA BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

LANDMARKS IN LOKAMANYA'S LIFE

By
N. C. KELKAR

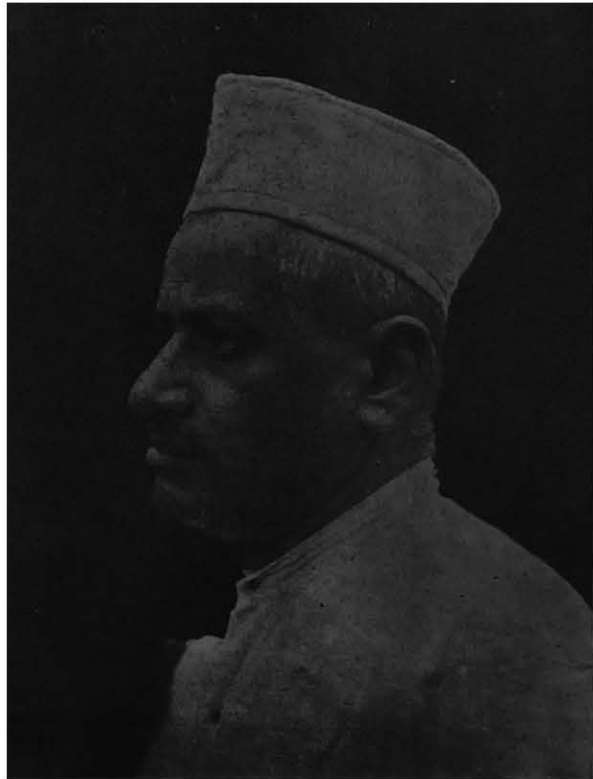


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N. C. KELKAR

FOREWORD

TO the material supplied by me for the booklet, Mr. Ganesan has given an apt and also alliterative title, namely, 'Landmarks in Lokamanya's Life'! Yes, my articles from the *Mahratta*, reprinted in this volume, and extending over a range of some 24 years, really point to landmarks in a memorable panoramic life. They do not depend for their capacity to impress the reader on any adventitious aid that I may have given them by my style or spirit, but they have an inherent and peremptory command of their own. The barest facts mentioned in my articles, even if bereft of all their literary drapery, are bound to challenge the respect of the sceptic and the cynic. Landmarks in Tilak's life are not the footprints of mediocrity; not the faint arrow-heads on sand made one moment by the light-footed hopping sea gull, and washed off the next by the first racing wave of the advancing tide. They are like rocks which successfully struggle for ages with the sea in all the fury of its anger, or the seductive operation of its erosive power.

The articles in this booklet were written by me as Editor of the *Mahratta* on different occasions marked by something extraordinary which happened to Lok. Tilak and which could, without impropriety, be discussed even in his own papers as topics of public interest. But perhaps I may be wrong in describing these occasions in this negative fashion. For they were, as all know, dealt with nearly in the same spirit at the same time by Indian public journals in every other part of India and that even whether they agreed or not with Lok. Tilak's politics.

Thus his arrest and prosecution in 1897 was a sensation that nearly pulled the mind of the country by its roots, as political prosecutions were then extremely rare, and Tilak was, in himself, a man big enough to mark an epoch by his personal misfortune. His incarceration of 12 months was punctuated by uncommon incidents like the very relevant trials of the murderers of Messrs. Rand and Ayerst, the remarkable clemency movement started by savants like Max Muller, and consequently his release was an all-India sensation again, though this time of an agreeable nature.

Very soon after Tilak settled down to his ordinary affairs, came up the Tai Maharaj Case which threatened to hit at him on the side of his personal character. A conviction for perjury would certainly be calculated to undermine all the prestige that he had acquired by a political prosecution. That was an obvious reason why Government caught at the opportunity; and they even succeeded in damning Tilak in the public eye for some time, till the High Court came to his rescue, set aside his conviction and wiped off all the criminal charges brought up against him. Ultimately, he also won the civil suit in the Privy Council and thus established his bonafides with a vengeance. It was Tilak's lot, if also his own favourite method, to welcome, face, and eventually conquer opposition, and so shine upon a back-ground which his opponent himself helped to supply. The Tai Maharaj Case, gratuitously and spitefully forced upon him by Government, only enabled him to display some very extraordinary qualities of head and heart bearing upon his private life, which he might not have otherwise been able to do.

Tilak's prosecution again in 1908 was a sensation much bigger than his prosecution in 1897. In 1897, he

was taken to be only an individual seditious. In 1908 he was looked upon as a type and a representative—a plausible emblem of a dangerous movement more formidable than any that Government ever felt called upon to face and suppress.

But his conviction and transportation for six long years did not finish him as was wished for by some and apprehended by others. He returned to the scene with, if anything, greater power to his elbow. The attempt of Government failed miserably—the attempt to smother and suppress him by the simple but momentous declaration that Tilak was an enemy of the administration. His production of a brilliant philosophical treatise on the *Gita* written in the jail idolized him as never before in the eyes of his Hindu countrymen, and the collapsing condition of the Congress in the hands of the Moderates afforded him the psychological moment to rejoin it, if only to conquer it.

The Home Rule agitation carried on by Tilak in co-operation with Mrs. Besant is the next landmark in his life; and though Mrs. Besant was interned for a time, the ill-advised prosecution of Tilak by Lord Willingdon's Government enabled him not only to strike the popular imagination with greater effect, but also to turn his acquittal by the High Court to good account in constitutionally and firmly establishing the right of the Indian people to demand the whole Swaraj and nothing but Swaraj; and to deprive the bureaucracy of the protection from criticism which they thought they could claim by their legally fictitious identification with the Government itself.

His jubilee, when Tilak attained his sixtieth year, was marked by an event unparalleled throughout India. He was on this occasion given by his friends and

admirers in the Maharashtra a purse of one lac of rupees which he, of course, 'touched and remitted' like a Nazarana, not without adding a mite of his own to it, to be funded into an investment so that Trustees holding it could perpetually be able to spend about five thousand rupees annually on some purpose of national importance.

The Chirol case which Tilak lodged and lost in England was the next landmark in his life. It was a bold bid and a big game that he played. The loss of the suit nearly involved him in bankruptcy. But once more his friends and admirers rose to the occasion and while he was yet in England, they raised a fund of 3 lacs of rupees which covered all his expenses. Tilak's visit to England was for himself an unique event, though many people had gone to that land before for pleading the cause of India. He was, of course, of no use for influencing the Government. But he was the first to cement the bonds of interest and friendship between the Indian Nationalist Party and the British Labour Party which was then emerging into hopeful prominence. Tilak died before he could visualise the effects of the policy of Responsive Co-operation. But he died at the height of his glory and when the whole Indian nation was feeling that they wanted him very badly.

Tilak was drawn by the painter Nature with some of the boldest and most striking touches of her brush. The landmarks of his life are so conspicuous that they will still stand, abide, and will have to be reckoned with, even when a new lay-out will be designed and new scenes will be enacted on the field of public life on which he once figured like a flaming torch of fiery patriotism.

POONA }
22nd July 1924 }

N. C. KELKAR

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