

BAL GANGADHAR TILAK: PERSONALITY (HISTORY)

NEWS: Prime Minister pays tributes to Lokmanya Tilak on his birth anniversary

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has paid tributes to Lokmanya Tilak on his birth anniversary. "He was a pioneering leader who played a vital role in kindling the spirit of India's freedom movement with unwavering conviction", Shri Modi stated.

Context:

- The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, paid tributes to Lokmanya Tilak on his birth anniversary, acknowledging him as a pioneering leader who significantly ignited the spirit of India's freedom movement with unwavering conviction.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1855–1920): A Profile

- **Birth:** Born on July 23, 1856, in Ratnagiri, Maharashtra.
- **Death:** Passed away on August 1, 1920, in Mumbai.
- **Title:** Widely revered as "Lokmanya Tilak," a title meaning "accepted by the people as their leader," signifying his immense popularity and influence among the masses.
- **Early Nationalist:** He was one of the earliest and most prominent nationalist leaders to vociferously demand "Swaraj" (self-rule) and actively oppose British colonial rule.
- **Mass Mobilization:** Tilak distinguished himself by advocating and employing mass-based political mobilization strategies, moving beyond the constitutional methods favored by early moderates.

Educational and Cultural Contributions:

- **Deccan Education Society (1884):** Co-founded with G.G. Agarkar and other associates, this society aimed to place education under Indian control, fostering a nationalistic approach to learning.
- **Fergusson College (1885):** As an extension of the Deccan Education Society's vision, Fergusson College was established to promote liberal and nationalistic education, nurturing future generations with a strong sense of national identity.
- **Cultural Nationalism:** Tilak firmly believed in leveraging cultural symbols for political awakening.
 - **Ganesh Chaturthi:** He popularized the public celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi, transforming a private religious festival into a grand public event to foster unity and a sense of collective identity among Hindus.
 - **Shivaji Jayanti:** Similarly, he initiated the celebration of Shivaji Jayanti, commemorating the birth of the Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji, to inspire national pride and resistance against foreign rule.

- **Collective Hindu Identity:** These celebrations served as powerful tools for mass mobilization, reinforcing a collective Hindu identity as a means to resist colonial suppression and unify the diverse Indian populace.

Ideology & Political Philosophy:

- **Swaraj as Birthright:** Tilak's most radical and enduring slogan was "Swaraj is my birth-right, and I shall have it!" This became a rallying cry for the nationalist movement and represented a significant shift from the moderate demands of the early Congress.
- **Opposition to Constitutionalism:** He strongly opposed the moderate faction's reliance on constitutional petitions and appeals to British goodwill, believing instead in direct action and widespread mass awakening to achieve political goals.
- **Gita Rahasya:** In his seminal work, *Gita Rahasya*, Tilak interpreted the Bhagavad Gita not as a text promoting passive renunciation but as a powerful call to action (karma yoga), urging individuals to actively participate in the struggle for national liberation.
- **Hindu Cultural Symbols:** His strong faith in and promotion of Hindu cultural symbols, while effective for mass awakening, occasionally drew criticism for being perceived as exclusivist or communal by some sections of society.

Role in Indian National Movement:

- **Early Political Involvement:**
 - **Joined INC (1890):** Tilak initially joined the Indian National Congress in 1890 and worked with the Moderates for a period.
 - **Lal-Bal-Pal Trio:** He soon emerged as a prominent leader of the "Extremist" faction within the Congress, forming a powerful triumvirate with Lala Lajpat Rai ("Lal") and Bipin Chandra Pal ("Pal"). This trio advocated for more assertive methods of protest.
- **Surat Split (1907):** This event marked a significant turning point where the Indian National Congress formally split into two factions: the Moderates and the Extremists. While this temporarily weakened the national movement, it also signaled the rise of a more assertive and radical form of nationalism.
- **Home Rule Movement (1916):**
 - **Inspiration:** Inspired by the Irish Home Rule movement, which sought self-governance within the British Empire.
 - **Founding:** Tilak launched his All India Home Rule League in April 1916, followed by Annie Besant's League in September 1916.
 - **Geographical Focus:** Tilak's League primarily focused its activities on Maharashtra (excluding Bombay city), the Central Provinces, Karnataka, and Berar.
 - **Impact:** The movement successfully mobilized the English-speaking middle class and played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for broader, mass-based national politics.

- **Lucknow Pact (1916):** This was a historic agreement between the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League. Tilak played a key role in bringing the two parties together.
- **Unity:** It marked a brief but significant phase of Hindu–Muslim unity in the freedom struggle.
- **Joint Reforms:** Both parties agreed to present joint demands for constitutional reforms to the British government and accepted the principle of separate electorates.

Newspapers and Writings:

- **Kesari (Marathi) and Mahratta (English):** Tilak used these two powerful newspapers as platforms to articulate his anti-colonial ideas, critique British policies, and mobilize public opinion.
- **Gita Rahasya:** This profound commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, written during his imprisonment, presented a philosophy of active resistance and duty (karma yoga) rather than passive renunciation, deeply influencing nationalist thought.
- **Arctic Home of the Vedas:** A controversial historical interpretation by Tilak, proposing that the Aryans originally migrated from the Arctic region.

Imprisonment and Revolutionary Sympathy:

- **Arrest (1908):** Tilak was arrested in 1908 on charges of sedition for his writings in *Kesari*, which were seen as supportive of the revolutionary activities of Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki.
- **Mandalay Jail:** He was subsequently imprisoned in Mandalay Jail, Burma (now Myanmar), for six years (1908–1914).
- **"Father of Indian Unrest":** British journalist Valentine Chirol famously labeled him the "Father of Indian Unrest" due to his relentless nationalist activities and writings.

Death:

- **Date:** Lokmanya Tilak passed away on August 1, 1920, in Mumbai.
- **Timing:** His death occurred shortly before the launch of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), marking the symbolic end of the first phase of assertive nationalism in India and the beginning of the Gandhian era.

Source: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2147109>