



LOKMANYA BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

Gayatri Pagdi

ISBN: 978-81-88569-30-4

Paperback; pp 255; 5.5" x 8.5"; mrp Rs 225

Indus Source Books (www.indussource.com)

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) was the first national leader of the Indian freedom movement who transcended provinces, communities, and languages to establish himself in the hearts of millions. Tilak was a fierce advocate of swarajya (self-rule) and his famous quote, "Swarajya is my birthright, and I shall have it!" is well-remembered even today. Tilak's life touched millions. He was a warrior-hero and a scholar-philosopher, a man who lived a life of action with total selflessness in the pursuit of freedom for his motherland. He was a soul steady in reason, a sthithapradnya. As he stood, rock-solid and consistent amidst the ocean of turmoil, he earned the love and admiration of the people and came to be identified as Lokmanya, "the admired one". This book explores the multi-faceted personality of Bal Gangadhar Tilak—social reformer, scholar, and national leader—through the eyes of the people, convincingly portraying a man of the people and the people of his times.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Gayatri Pagdi is a full-time writer, translator, editor and professional ghostwriter of books related to Indian culture & religion, self-empowerment and alternative healing. She is a published author in the UK and her writing has been included in the South Asian Literary Review brought out by the University of Pittsburgh, USA, as a promising contemporary South Asian writer and poet. She has also received an acknowledgment for her work from the prestigious Sahitya Akademi in 2007. Pagdi, who has worked on more than 30 books in the past five years in various capacities, is based in Mumbai.

Chapter Two

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The visionary who impressed upon his countrymen that “material, spiritual and religious development of undeveloped nations can be achieved only through education” apparently started off his own contact with education by tearing books apart busily and spreading the loose pages about with gay abandon. N. R. Phatak, in his book *Lokmanya*, recounts this amusing beginning of an auspiciously brilliant academic and scholastic career. The books, apparently, belonged to his father’s students.

From the age of three, Tilak started learning a Sanskrit *shlok* a day. He was bribed a pai per *shlok* which ensured that by the time he was five, he had already learnt a lot by heart! To be able to recognise letters, he was given the game of *Ganjifa*; making the task seem like play worked nicely. In 1861, Tilak entered school. By the time he had his thread ceremony, he was already adept at numbers, simple and slightly complex calculations, many mantras except for the Gayatri, and most of the *Amarkosh* that the students then had to know.

In 1866, Tilak went to Poona with his parents and completed three grades in two years. In 1869, when he went to the high school, he discovered that he had already finished studying most of the syllabus in the previous years. An oft-quoted example of his brightness in school was the three ways in which he managed to write the word “sant” in Marathi as against the two of every other student. The teacher did not like it and Tilak was taken to the headmaster who did not find anything wrong with it but decided to punish him for what the teacher took to be some sort of arrogance and insubordination. The teacher had found a questioning student a challenge to his authority. Tilak dropped out of the school and tried out another. He returned to the earlier school after the headmaster was transferred.

His independence remained unchanged. Once, in the high school when the teacher taught poetry, the *Naishadh Kavya*, in class Tilak did not copy it down. On being asked why he didn’t bother to, Tilak answered that it would help him more if he translated it by himself. He seemed to have been good at it because by the time he was fourteen his father was stunned to see how wonderful his command over Sanskrit and English was and how well he wrote poetry in Sanskrit. This study laid a strong foundation for the scholar who later wrote works of monumental research and brilliance.

Tilak passed the matriculation examination in 1872 and joined the Deccan College for higher studies in 1873. After the first term, he became a resident student. As a student Tilak always went to the root of the subject and studied it, reading a number of other books as reference. His aim was to understand a subject, not merely score marks. When he had to study the lessons on the reign of Queen Mary and Elizabeth, Tilak set aside the textbook and instead referred to many other books and wrote out a new chapter on the subject entirely on his own. His work often served as reference to other students. He never cared for scholarships and at times his uncle, with whom he lived, expressed disappointment at his bright nephew not being able to have a prestigious scholarship to his name. And yet, later in college Tilak was a junior scholar and was the recipient of monthly scholarships of ten rupees in 1874 and 1875.

Tilak was fairly close to his professor of mathematics, Kerunana Chhatre. Tilak was a teacher's dream and Chhatre himself was considered a *mahapandit* of the subject. Even as a school student, Tilak often went to Chhatre to solve some of his doubts and queries over which he had disagreements with his school teachers. Later, as a college student who raised the most complex doubts and forced a teacher to think really deep, Tilak became Chhatre's favourite student. Tilak's command over mathematics and Sanskrit became a topic of discussion in the Deccan College. Professor Chhatre was proud of his student's striking originality of thought. Tilak studied for one term at Elphinstone College, Mumbai, in 1875 but did not feel comfortable in the Mumbai college. He returned to Poona for the second term.

Chhatre encouraged Tilak in his studies and at times even gave astronomy lessons to him and his friends at night. This was said to have helped Tilak while writing *The Orion*. But Tilak was not as fortunate with some other teachers who resented his questioning nature. As homage to his guru, Tilak completed some of Chhatre's unfinished work after his death. Chhatre was a master of mathematics and astronomy and his brilliance often saw his European professor colleagues intimidated by his knowledge. All of this contributed to a fiercely patriotic Tilak's affection for his guru. However, there was another professor who also made an impact on Tilak. He was Professor William Wordsworth, an Englishman and the grandson of the famous poet of the same name. Professor Shoot was also another man who influenced Tilak. The former taught him English literature and the latter taught him history and political economy, which helped him to appreciate English ideas. Tilak, in spite of his Hindu conservatism, was much influenced by Western thought on politics and metaphysics. He was particularly fond of Hegel, Kant, Spencer, Mill, Bentham, Voltaire, and Rousseau. As he expressed in the *Geeta Rahasya*, "To a certain extent my line of argument runs parallel to the line of thinking followed by Green in his book on Ethics."

Tilak studied late at night. He started on his studies after everyone else went to bed and worked through the night. He was outspoken, earning himself the nickname "Blunt". Fond of debates and heated discussions, he was also known as the "Devil". And because he was an all-rounder in his studies, some called him "All-round" or simply, "Round". He passed

his BA in 1876 securing a first class and turned his attention to law for two years. He joined the law college for a professional degree.

It was during his college days that Tilak came in contact with Agarkar with whom he was to share a complex relationship later.

Tilak had been aware of the corrupting and stultifying effect of British-inspired education on the Indian mind. The education, he believed, was based on the racist assumption of western cultural superiority over eastern races. Both Tilak and Agarkar began to think of ways in which they could establish private schools on the model of missionary institutions. Mahadev Govind Ranade, a very respected educationist, also felt that the country would not be emancipated unless it had, like America, its national press and national education. Tilak and Agarkar approached Vishnushastri Chiplunkar who welcomed the idea and agreed to join them in their venture. Chiplunkar resigned from the job of a teacher in a government school at Chiplun and opened a school in Poona in January 1880. This school, the New English School, was to make history in the cultural and political life of Poona. Tilak joined on the first day as promised. Agarkar came in after his MA examination in January 1881. Soon like-minded men like Mahadev Ballal Namjoshi joined them.

All of them worked without remuneration for the first year. It was a school driven by the passion of its founders and teachers. The teachers were mentors and father figures to the students. For the students who were not very quick to pick up, Tilak started special preparatory classes, which would enable them to catch up with the others. The classes also later provided employment to the ex-students. Tilak was always accessible to the students who could always go to him to get their doubts resolved. In 1882, when the Education Commission under the chairmanship of Sir William Hunter visited the then Bombay Presidency, the workers of the New English School made such an impression on the commission and the prominent men of the Bombay University that they encouraged them to start a college to impart higher education to Indians. In 1884, the group was able to establish the Deccan Education Society (DES) and in 1885 they founded the Fergusson College which was to become one of India's foremost institutions of higher learning. Tilak mostly taught Sanskrit and mathematics in this college.

As a professor of mathematics, Tilak had a strange habit. He solved the problems orally. He never ever worked them on the blackboard which meant that only those who had a special interest in mathematics could match his speed. To break this habit, the students would go to him with the most complex problems but to their stupefaction he would find the solutions in moments, of course orally. Those who weren't too quick had a tough time keeping pace with his explanation of binominal theorem, separation of series etc.

Tilak also taught Sanskrit. He would teach *Meghdoot* by Kalidas and Bhratruhari's *Naishadh Kavya*. These lectures were more interesting to many of his students. Tilak had a knack of making the poetry even more appealing and he was wonderful at explaining the technique of

how one *shloka* led to another. His ability of going to the basis of any subject enthused many of his students to deeply explore the subject of their study. When he taught English he would usually explain the gist of a paragraph rather than explaining it word by word. Tilak appeared intimidating but was extremely warm at heart and the students knew it. Teacher and students shared an excellent rapport.

After Tilak left the society, he started law classes. The fees were four rupees a month and even though the rule was that no one would be allowed in without the fees, Tilak did make some exceptions for sincere but badly off students. Tilak also had a young lawyer for an assistant and taught once every alternate day. When too involved with the newspapers, Tilak was often delayed or cancelled the lectures. After coming to the class, he browsed through the books of the relevant subject for a few minutes before starting on the lecture. His lectures were so remarkable that at times established lawyers came and attended them.¹

Tilak also had definite views on women's education. He wrote editorials on the topic in *Kesari* and *Mahratta*. He objected to the curriculum of the girls' school which followed that of British schools. He believed that since the cultural and social background of Indian girls was totally different from that of British girls, the curricula had to be different. He also objected to the school timing of six hours. He recommended a half-day school, which would enable the girls to balance housework and studies.

Tilak identified the lack of Sanskrit learning as one of the causes of India's downfall. At a speech delivered at Barshi many years later he said, "That which gives us a knowledge of the experience of our ancestors is called education . . . How can a person be proud of his religion if he is ignorant of it? The want of religious education is one of the causes that brought the missionary influence all over our country."²

Tilak advocated a three-point programme against British rule which included the boycott of British goods, in particular, textiles; swadeshi or the promotion of Indian goods, industries and commerce; and national education. This entailed the founding of national schools throughout the country including in villages, which would be independent of the British government and would use their own textbooks. The main points outlined by Tilak were:

1. Religious education which was necessary to give young Indians knowledge of their spiritual heritage and build up their character. He said, "Religious education is necessary because the study of high principles keeps us away from evil pursuits. Religion reveals to us

¹ Source: *Lokmany* by N. R. Phatak, Mauj Prakashan, 1972.

² Source: 'National Education', speech delivered at Barshi, 27 February 1908, from *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speeches*, Ganesh & Co. Madras, 1918.

the form of the Almighty. Our religion says that a man by virtue of his action can become even a god. When we can become gods even by virtue of our action, why may we not become wise and active by means of our action like the Europeans? Some say that religion begets quarrels. But I ask, 'Where is it written in religion to pick quarrels?' If there be any religion in the world which advocates toleration of other religious beliefs and instructs one to stick to one's own religion, it is the religion of the Hindus. Hinduism to the Hindus, Islamism to the Musalmans will be taught in these schools, and it will also be taught there to forget the differences of other religions."

2. Education in vernacular languages. Tilak asserted that they would "lighten the load of the study of the foreign languages". He pointed out how "in spite of a long stay in India no European can speak for a couple of hours fluent Marathi, while our graduates are required as a rule to obtain proficiency in the English language. One who speaks and writes good English is said, in these days, to have been educated. But a mere knowledge of the language is no true education. Such a compulsion for the study of foreign languages does not exist anywhere except in India. We spend twenty or twenty-five years for the education, which we can easily obtain in seven or eight years if we get it through the medium of our vernaculars. We cannot help learning English; but there is no reason why its study should be made compulsory."

3. Industrial education, which would help India become independent from foreign-controlled industries. Tilak said in his speech at Barshi,

In no school is this (industrial) education given. It will be given in these schools. It is an important thing. During the whole of this century we have not known how a match is prepared. In Sholapur matches are manufactured from straw; and straw is found abundantly in our country. If therefore this industry is taken into our hands the importation of matches will largely decrease in India. It is the same with the sugar industry. We can procure here as good sugarcane as is found in Mauritius. It is seen by scientific experiments that the sugarcane found in the suburbs of Poona can produce as much sugar as is found in the sugarcane of Mauritius. Six crores of rupees are drained out every year from this country only for sugar. Why should this be? Well, can we not get sugarcane here? Or the machinery necessary for its manufacture? The reason is that we do not get here the education in this industry. It is not so in Germany. The Department of Industry investigates there as to which industry is decaying, and if perchance there be any, in a decaying state, substantial support at once comes forth from the Government for reviving it. The British Government, too, does the same thing in England. But our Government does not do it here. It may be a mistake or the Government may be doing it knowingly, but it is clear that we must not sit silent if the Government is not doing it. We are intending to start a large mechanical and scientific laboratory. National Education for this purpose. Sugar produces Rab and from Rab is extracted liquor, but the Government does not permit us this extraction; hence we cannot get cheap sugar here. Mauritius imports to this country twenty thousand tons of sugar every year. All this is due to the policy of the Government, but we do not know it. The Government will be obliged to change it if we put pressure upon it. We have come to learn these things not earlier than

twenty-five years after leaving the college. Our young men should know them in their prime of life.

4. Political education that would raise the nation's consciousness of its situation. Tilak said,

We are not given such education as may inspire patriotic sentiments amongst us. In America the Proclamation of Independence is taught in V or VI classes [*viz*]. In this way they train their children in politics. Some eighty or ninety years ago the industries of Germany declined on account of the rivalry between England and that country. But the German Government at once started scientific and mechanical education in that country. In this way Germany became so powerful in commerce that she has now become an object of dread to other countries. Properly speaking these things ought to be done by the Government itself. We pay taxes to the Government only that it may look after our welfare. But the Government wants to keep us lame. There is conflict between the commercial interests of England and India. The Government therefore cannot do anything in this matter. There being no convenient schools in the villages, our villagers cannot train their children. We must therefore begin this work. There has been a good deal of discussion over this matter. And in the end we have come to the conclusion that for proper education national schools must be started on all sides. There are some of our private schools but owing to the fear of losing the grant-in-aid, the necessary education cannot be given there. We must start our own schools for this education. We must begin our work selflessly.

Tilak also campaigned for the militarisation of the Indian people, demanding the establishment of military colleges and a militia force.

A brilliant student and a teacher to the core, for Tilak the concept of education went far beyond the periphery of an academic institution. Education was meant to nurture patriotic sentiments among the people, which would eventually lead them to challenge the legitimacy of British rule and shake off the chains of foreign subjugation.

Chapter Six

THEATRE LOVERS

In the first chapter of his *Natya Shastra* Bharata gives an account of the creation of drama. He attributes it, in a mythical form, to Brahma, the God of creation. The drama, according to Bharata, was to serve various purposes. It was to be a source of pleasure to the minds weary of strife, wants, and miseries of daily existence. But besides offering entertainment, drama could also influence and uplift the minds of spectators. *Natya* would teach duty to those who went against it and chasten those who were imprudent. It would bring about self-restraint in the undisciplined, give courage to cowards, and energy to the heroic.

On 1 February 1881, the *Kesari* wrote an editorial on drama as an art form. The article emphasised that although there were wonderful books on dramatic arts it did not automatically ensure great theatre performances. There needed to be good troupes before one talked of how theatre as an art form could be improved. On 19 December 1881, in an article that seemed emphatic about the fact that plays were good for society, the paper also welcomed the fact that the intelligentsia was moving towards theatre in a big way. And that it was not at the cost of cerebral, creative activities.

On 6 December of the same month, the paper had congratulated Natyacharya Kirloskar for writing a play like *Sangeet Shakuntala* despite holding a full-time job that took up most of his time. “The *Kesari* will not hold back from lauding the efforts of a brave man like him,” the paper said. “We roar our approval and support.” On 20 and 28 December, the paper asked if theatre was indeed bringing about a downfall of morality in society and answered the question itself by saying that a play was a reflection of human life and reading and watching plays was in no way dangerous. The paper also published a letter from a reader, which proposed that it was more important to build theatres than lecture halls. It mentioned how the theatre group, Kirloskar Natak Mandali, was building a theatre of its own. *Kesari* wished them well and hoped that the “sangeet natak” or the musical plays would add to the prosperity of music and culture.

Kesari's affection and encouragement for a theatre group had a background. Those were the days when industrialisation in Europe had brought in new ideas and values. Western education had conveyed to India the ideas of democracy and new theories relating to religion. They began to sweep across the country, encouraging new thought and fresh new approaches towards existing norms. In the process, they altered a lot of traditional perceptions. Tilak, along with Agarkar and Tatyasaheb Kelkar, was quick to recognise theatre's political potential. The Bengali theatre had already started work along those lines. Soon Tilak decided to adopt theatre as one of the forms of reaching the message of freedom to the masses. Theatre was popular, had an immediate effect, and ignited the imagination of hundreds of people at the same time. Plays could be used to disseminate ideas to steer society on to the path of freedom, social progress, and modernity.

The British government was quick to sense the danger that the situation presented. The infamous Dramatic Performances Act was passed in 1876. The government's representative, Mr. Hobbhouse, who introduced the bill, supported his argument in its favour by quoting from Plato's *Republic*. He said, “It has been found in all times and in all countries that no greater stimulus could be supplied to excite the passions of mankind than that supplied by means of the drama.” The bill was passed into law and gave strong censorship powers to local authorities throughout the country.³ The Dramatic Performances Act, or the DPA, was brought into force under the administration of Viceroy Northbrook. DPA outlined the

³ Source: *The Englishman*, 15 March 1876, quoted in *The Political Role of Theatre in India* by Farley Richmond in *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol 25, No.3, Oct. 1973.

restrictions that public performances of a play, pantomime or any other drama would have to adhere to. According to this Act, if the state government judged any play to be of a scandalous nature, thought it disrupted social values, felt that it might excite feelings of disaffection against the government established by law or that it would corrupt persons, then the said performance would stand prohibited.

The Act further stated that if any person or groups on whom an order of prohibition had been served refused to comply with the same, such persons or groups would be liable to be punished. The penalty for disobedience of the terms of the Act was either imprisonment for a term extending to about three months, or a fine, or in some cases, both. The Act conferred upon the government the right to information, by which right the persons as empowered by the Act could demand the procurement of all such plays for verification whose content might violate one or many terms of the Act. The police was granted the license to enter, arrest and seize any persons, scenery, costumes, and or articles whose use or intended use in the performance as prohibited under the terms of the Dramatic Performances Act, had been reasonably established. By this Act, no public performance was to take place in any local area without the sanction of a license.

Professional theatre lovers, who till then were content with entertainment, were now driven by a sense of identity and nationalism. While it was initially the cultural angle that seemed to attract the middle class and the entertainment angle that mostly drew the illiterate masses, the inspiration that both the sections derived from the plays was alike. Tilak gave a nationalist direction to the plays. While the plays continued to be mythologicals for a while, he inspired the leading playwrights of the day to take recourse to metaphorical expression to emphasise nationalistic ideas. Playwrights now became experts at introducing such themes wrapped in religious, historical, or mythological stories to serve a growing sentiment against the British government.

In 1907 came a play by playwright and journalist Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar. Named as *Keechakvadh* (The Slaying of Keechak), the play had very strong political overtones and set a powerful precedent. The political movement was on in full swing in Maharashtra. The government was on its toes watching out for sedition everywhere. Public feeling against Lord Curzon was very strong. The play told the story of the Pandavas residing in Viratnagari in disguise during the last year of their exile. Keechak, the commander-in-chief of King Virat's army was virtually the ruler and eyed Draupadi who was in the disguise of Queen Sudeshna's maid, Sairandhri. Tired of his overtures, Draupadi complained to Bhim, the radical one who could be trusted to save her, rather than the mild and ineffective Yudhishtir. Bhim thought out a plan according to which Draupadi lured the villain to a lonely place where Bhim, waiting in hiding, slayed him. An extract from the *Times of India* commenting on the play, said,

Although his name is nowhere uttered on the stage or mentioned in the printed play, everyone in the theatre knows that Keechak is really intended to be Lord Curzon, that Draupadi is

Mother India and that Yudhishtir is the Moderate, and Bhim the Extremist party. Every now and again unmistakable clues are provided. The question indeed admits no doubt, for since the play first appeared the whole of Deccan has been blazoning for the identity of the characters. Once they have been recognised, the inner meaning of the play becomes clear. A weak Government at Home represented by King Virat has given the Viceroy a free hand. He has made use of it to insult and humiliate India. Of the two champions, the moderates advocate gentle that is constitutional measures. The extremists out of the deference to the older party agree, although satisfied of the ineffectiveness, waiting until this has been demonstrated, they then adopt violent methods and . . . the oppressor is disposed off without difficulty.

The play charged many a youth in Maharashtra against British rule. One of them, it is said, was Anant Kanhere who assassinated the collector of Nasik, A. M. T. Jackson of the Indian Civil Service in December 1909 at a theatre where he had gone to watch another famous Marathi play, *Sharda*.

Jackson's murder alarmed the government. To these were added an unsuccessful attempt to hurl a bomb at Viceroy Lord Minto and Tilak's deportation to Mandalay. Against the entire backdrop of armed agitations and government's measures to suppress Tilak, *Keechakvadh* gained tremendous popularity. Jackson's friend, Charles Kincaid, district session's judge, who watched a performance of the play, wrote articles in the *Times* published from London. He said that the play was veritably an allegory on Lord Curzon's regime as viceroy of India. And that "no Englishman would forget in his lifetime the anger and turbulent expressions on the face of the Marathi audience, while watching the deeds of Keechak on the stage. The pathetic entreaties of Draupadi would draw profuse tears from the ladies in the theatre. These effects were indeed unmistakable and unforgettable." Kincaid suggested that the only way in which the lives of the British officers could be saved was to throttle the freedom of expression of the Indians through legislation. While grudgingly admitting that Khadilkar was a "talented playwright", he emphatically stated that the play stimulated high treason and sedition. The police felt that Khadilkar did not invite prosecution for writing the play but the play itself could be banned. *Keechakvadh* was officially banned on 27 January 1890.

Kincaid was not the only one complaining. William Lee Warner and Valentine Chirol were demanding stern measures to suppress Indian nationalist expression through the stage. The Press Act of 1910 throttled the media completely. The ban on *Keechakvadh* was removed after a long time when the hostility of the government against Tilak softened. The retrieval came at Amravati when a special committee found it advisable to lift the ban.

Khadilkar's *Bhaubandaki* was based on the deportation of Tilak, and portrayed a character with the powerful, upright and truth-pursuing qualities of the judge of the Peshwas, Ramshastri Prabhune. This play too invited the annoyance of the government. The district magistrate declared *Bhaubandaki* as objectionable by the end of 1910. It is said that the

atmosphere was so charged in those years that at times the audience read more politics in the play than was intended by the playwrights.

In the days when *Kesari* was synonymous with Tilak, the playwrights looked upon Tilak as a divine avatar. They immortalised him in their plays in many forms. *Sangeet Swayamvar* was a take off on the Surat split; in *Bhasmasur*, the words mouthed by the character of Shri Vishnu were in keeping with Tilak's views; the Shri Krishna in the play *Kalicha Narad* was Tilak; *Dhanurbhanga* used as its catchphrase Tilak's famous quotations from his speeches. All these were mythologicals.

Even in the historical plays, one could see Tilak. The play *Maharana Pratap* had shades of Tilak; *Ranarajini* had a character based on Tilak; and a play called *Mahatma* was based on Tilak's concept of the Shivaji celebrations. Among the social plays, there were plays like *Lokmatvijay* (The triumph of People's Will) and *Dharmarashtra* (The Secret of Faith). There was a play based on Tilak's trial called *Rajkopkabar* (The King's Wrath) and his freedom, *Bandhavimochan* (The Unshackling).

There were also several plays written in Hindi on Tilak and his work. In north India, Tilak was referred to as Bhagwan Tilak. Some of the plays were called *Punaragaman* (The Return) and *Deshsevak* (The Helper of the Nation). The latter was written by Munshi Farog and contained the following lines:

*Hind ka sitara Lokmanya Tilak hai
Swarajya mera janmasiddha jak hai
Zindagi hai meri is kaam ke liye
Angrezon Hind se janabi chahiye.*

(Lokmanya Tilak is the shining star of India,
Swaraj is my birthright,
My life is devoted to this cause,
the British will have to leave India.)

One of the actors who played the protagonist in a play written by playwright Giridharlal Bakshi resembled Tilak. Every time the actor appeared on stage, the crowd rushed to garland him and touch his feet.

The handbills of Kirloskar Natak Mandali bore the signature of Tilak. His commitment to drama and stage made him a patron of the Aryoddharak Mandali of Govind Ballal Deval and Shakarrao Patkar. Tilak had honoured this company by accepting the manager-ship of *Othello* staged by it. A bankbook of Aryoddharak Natak Mandali had an entry of Rs. 30 against Tilak's name.⁴

⁴ Source: K. D. Dixit, *100 years of Kesari*.

Along with Tilak, people like Mahadev Moreshwar Kunte, Neelkanth Janardan Keertane and Mahadev Govind Ranade, who were the leading lights of the nationalist organisation, Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, also took a deep interest in Marathi drama and literature. The first conference of Marathi writers was convened in the hall of the sabha.

Tilak had such faith in the power of the stage to challenge the government effectively that he advised his student Nanasaheb Joglekar, who was studying law in his classes, to join the Kirloskar Natak Mandali. Joglekar took the advice. Tilak was also responsible for giving Marathi theatre its brightest gem, Narayan Shripad Rajhans, who he described as “Bal Gandharva” (The Young Celestial Singer). The young man stepped on the stage on the Gurudwadashi day of 1904 as Shakuntala and left the audience spellbound. He went on to be known as Bal Gandharva all his life. It is said that Bal Gandharva’s mother had no problems about her son entering theatre but his father was skeptical. Tilak promised to pay the family Rs. 20,000 if the young man’s theatre career did not take off. For the next decade and more Bal Gandharva ruled Marathi theatre.

It is interesting that Prof. Chintaman Gangadhar Bhanu, who shared Tilak’s social and political ideology, was the mentor of the Maharashtra Natak Mandali that staged Khadilkar’s plays like *Kanchangadachi Mohana* (Mohana of Kanchangad), (1904), *Sawai Madhavravanacha Mrityu* (The Death of Sawai Madhavrao), (1906), *Keechakvadh* (1907), *Bayakanche Band* (Women’s Rebellion), (1907) and *Bhaubandaki* (Filial Feud), (1909).

As many as thirty-one plays were banned during 1897-1913 under some provision of law. The popular amongst them were *Swadeshi Natak* and *Bhatji Bovachi Sankrant* of Ganesh Ballal Phansalkar of Satara, *Prithviraj Sanyukta* of Ganesh Dhunddev Kane, *Vanga Vadh* by Purushottam Sathe, *Maharana Pratapsingh* by Anant Barve, *Samarth Ramadas* and *Bhimrao* by Laxman Narayan Joshi, *Swadeshi Chahval* by Ismail Yusuf alias Babaji Bhaladar, *Sangeet Bhatuklichha Khel* by Dhonde Ramchandra Kamarkar, *Vijay Teran* of Ramchandra Mahadev Mahiskar, and *Rana Bhimdev* jointly written by V. R. Shirwalkar and V. T. Modak.⁵

The theatre groups increased in number and in 1913, when the Gandharva Natak Mandali started its own venture, *Kesari* advised them that even though they had broken away from the original Kirloskar Natak Mandali, they should not compete with them but co-exist in harmony for the good of the dramatic arts.

In keeping with Tilak’s ideas, the playwrights and the groups also continued to explore new genres with Tilak’s encouragement and expressed social concerns solidly. There were explicit satires on regressive customs and an attack on social evils. The plays became more

⁵ Source: *Maharashtra: The Land and its People, Marathi Stage*, By Dr. K. K. Chaudhari.

and more purposeful and goal-oriented. The aim of the theatre lovers then was to better society through a social message wrapped in entertainment. There were also plays which were based on Shakespeare's writings. In 1919, in Tilak's honour, the Kirloskar Natak Mandali performed the play *Tratika* (based on *The Taming of the Shrew*) at the new Aryabhushan Theater in Pune. Tilak was present on the occasion.

Tilak also continued to use the stage shows to share his views on the political scenario as much as he could. At one time Lord Chelmsford said in a speech regarding India's role in the World War, "Results from the stimulated mobilisation of India's resources could not have been achieved without stress and strain. In that stress and strain all have shared in varying degree—officials, businessmen and general community alike. For the most part the burden has been borne cheerfully. Where murmurings and grumblings have been heard, they can almost always be traced to a failure to recognise that the restrictions or hardships or whatever the objects of complaint may be, arise from the imperious necessities of war." Tilak offered him a rejoinder in his speech at the Kirloskar Theatre in Pune. He said,

A calamity is hanging over India. What is that to us? Why should we come forward to protect that India in which we have no rights, in which we are treated like slaves? At this juncture they want a salaried army, they want mercenaries who will work under them and thereby their authority—the authority of the bureaucracy—will remain inviolate. The bureaucracy has overrun the whole nation and we are not prepared to become soldiers in order to increase the power of these men. Declare publicly that they would all get appointments in the military department and would have the same rights as Europeans and one or two or ten lakhs of people will this day be ready to die. The sarkar says that we come in the way of the work of recruitment. We do not do so at all. He who wishes to go as a recruit for Rs 100 is sure to go in spite of anything we may tell him. But there are thousands of people who will not be available as recruits for Rs 100. They will not go though we may tell them to do so. What are we to tell them? "Join the army to strengthen the zulm (oppression) of these English people?" If we have to defend against the Turks and Germans a country in which we have no swarajya in which our welfare is not encompassed. Which is possibly to be invaded by Germany or by the Turks, what does it matter if the country be in the possession of the Turks or the possession of the English? If the English continue to act in future in the same manner, it is to be distinctly told to them that they will not get assistance from this nation in this matter.

Of course, soon Tilak received a statement from the government saying, "The general purport of the speech are calculated to discourage recruiting for the Indian army and whereas in the opinion of the Governor of Bombay in council there are reasonable grounds for believing that you have thereby acted in a manner prejudicial to the public safety and the defence of India, therefore the governor in council is pleased to direct you pending further orders to abstain from making any public speech without previous permission in writing of the district magistrate."

The government made a feeble attempt to silence Tilak but with Tilak's blessings, Marathi theatre had found its voice, stronger than ever before.

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