

Tilak's Diary

Tilak's health fails, his preference for Christianity becomes known, Lakshmi writes a poem. Temptations and dangers surround Tilak.

Part 1, Chapter 24, pp. 111-115.

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[Tilak] began to show openly his preference for Christianity, and had some articles to that effect printed in the Christian paper *Dyanodaya*. Here is another extract from his diary: 'I have finished the life of Hari Ramachandra Khisti. The joy I experienced in reading the Vedas during my study of Hinduism, or which I experienced during the enthusiastic conversations with Mohamedan religious leaders when I was making a study of their religion, is as nothing compared to the joy experienced in reading these Christian books. How many books, given so kindly by missionaries have I thrown away without reading, torn up even! But that was only when I was very young.

As usual Tilak went out one day. I put Dattu to sleep and sat down with an anxious heart. We need someone to whom we can tell our griefs and joys. Whom had I? One boy, who knew nothing beyond his play and sweets. There were some people against Tilak, so I did not dare to speak to anyone outside—also they spoke another language. Everyone was saying that Tilak was going to become a Christian.

When he came in. I asked him:

'Are you really going to be a Christian?'

'Who says so?'

'People.'

'Did you marry me or people?'

'You.'

'Then will you believe what I say or what people say?'

'What you say.'

'Then I tell you, That I will not be a Christian.'

Having said this Tilak went out.

I put the chain on the door, and with great sobs, cried my heart out. I felt better after it. Waves rise on the calm water's face with light puffs of wind. My mind was churned by storms from past present and future. I wrote my first poem that day.

I remember it still:

I rise and leave thee, saith my lord.
Who then shall I call King and God?
Since Thou alone pervadest all
Say, say, at whose feet may I fall.

The last line was barely finished when the door was shaken. Crumpling up the paper in my hand I threw it into the waste paper basket. The door was still being shaken. Tilak was angry because it was not opened at once. He said:

'You never chain the door, why do it today?'

He was suspicious of me:

'What were you doing?'

'I was resting.'

'Why did you not open the door at once?'

'One needs a moment to rise up. You would think I was a machine.'

'Away! Bring me my dinner.'

I went through to the kitchen. As soon I was gone, he began to look about. He thought I must have been writing a letter to someone. He could not understand it all. He came to the wastepaper basket and turned it upside down. Turning over all the papers he found out my poem. He was filled with pleasure, took it and locked it up in the cupboard.

During these days he kept all his papers under lock and key. When he was out people came to me and asked to see his correspondence and papers. I used to reply, 'I shall never show them to anyone. Though you desire it for my own good, I can never let you see them.'

'At least burn the copy of the Bible on his table.'

I replied, 'If I burn this copy will all the Bibles in the world be destroyed? Answer and I shall burn it.'

On receiving this reply they used to go away.

My real reason for not letting them see his papers was quite different. We were living in a small State. I thought the State at this time was watching Brahmans from the West coast, because some had been thrown into prison on one pretext or another; if there should be found something against the Raja amongst Tilak's papers what would happen? Tilak had tried very hard to put an end to the oppression of the labourers in the State. He has a note to this effect in his diary of 4 January: 'One hundred workers are being brought out of the Fort in charge of five or six policemen. They are carrying an iron cage for a tiger from Mr. Khare. Yesterday from morning till three o' clock one hundred men were kept unfed and the cage not moved twenty cubits. The cage was on their heads; they could not even draw breath. In this position one of the men hurt his foot. Agonized with the pain of it he ceased to exert his full strength, and a servant struck him with a whip as if he had been a beast. What tyranny! What cruelty! What cowardliness in these parts! What endurance! In Western countries, could a couple of policemen tyrannize over a crowd of a hundred men? If the Raja with his own eyes could see their pitiful state it would be a good thing.

'First a petition should be sent to the Raja about it. A petition has been written in Hindi about four or five labourers, and given to Sharangapani and Sadashivrao to be presented to the Raja. It has been decided that while these two are at hand I shall go and speak to the raja about it. Many people think that I am mad to attempt it. The head clerk of the court thinks that it is presumptuous. O God, have mercy upon these poor men, and give me courage, and the Raja a compassionate heart. Come what may, trusting in Thee I shall make the effort without fail.' In another place he says, 'I intend to write a book that will open the Raja's eyes.'

I believed either on account of this agitation or because he was going to become a Christian, but still using the agitation as an excuse, some people wished to get Tilak into trouble, and therefore were asking to see his letters. As a result I began to keep a very careful watch.

It was a Native state. With no cover or concealment Tilak wrote what he liked. What would happen if anyone misinterpreted his writings to trap him. I began to take care of every scrap of paper.

More and more visitors began to gather in our house. Always new and more guests came. There was the unending commotion of argument and discussion between them and Tilak. One day I asked Tilak who all these people were and why they came?

'They are trying to convert me' he answered.

One man said: 'Look here Tilak I have no one. I have a lot of property. I shall will it all to you.' He was prepared to adopt him.

Tilak replied, 'I shall not be a Christian. And if I did become one, it would not be for money.'

Appasaheb sent Gopal to Rajnandgaon on purpose to say, 'I shall give you a hundred rupees a month for life with a house, and educate Dattu, but do not become a Christian.' Tilak calmed Gopal's mind and sent him back.

Pendse heard in Nasik that Tilak was going to become a Christian. He sent a letter saying, 'Come and live with me, I shall provide for you all your life and pay for Dattu's schooling. If you like, eat meat and fish in my house, drink what you will, I shall never stop you, but do not become a Christian.'

Appasaheb had private banks all over the district. Everyone of them was told to spy on Tilak. As he left Gopal told me all about it and gave me money.

'If anything untoward happens we shall hold him back somehow. We shall prove he is in debt and put him in a prison, but shall not allow him to become a Christian. Do not be afraid.'