

KESARI'S JOURNEY OF A NATIONAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

Kesari, the newspaper started by Lokmanya Tilak, completed a hundred and forty one years of its journey on the 4th of January 2022. This is indeed phenomenal in the history of vernacular journalism in India as it is the one and the only newspaper in vernacular languages that is being published by a Trust continuously for the last 141 years. Lokmanya Tilak Launched 'Kesari' newspaper for securing independence for the country. His wish was fulfilled, though not during his life-time. This paper aims to emphasis the contribution of 'Kesari' in freedom struggle as well as its work of building a Modern India.

Keywords: *Kesari, Lokmanya Tilak, freedom struggle, journalism*

Introduction

This journey of the 'Kesari', hard and committed as it is, needs a special mention in the history of journalism in the country. This is not merely an account of the work done by a Marathi newspaper. It is a historical record of 141 years, of the political, economic, social and cultural revival of the whole nation. Lokmanya's 'Kesari' has been a witness to the period of not less than three centuries. The 'Kesari' has pursued this course with the aim of 'Swaraj' (self-government) in the pre-independence period and 'Suraj' (good-governance) in the post-independence period. There is no aspect of the people's life in Maharashtra that has not been influenced by the 'Kesari' in its own way. It has made a strong impact in the field of politics, social issues, literature, philosophy, sports, science, entertainment, education, agriculture, industry and so on. Lokmanya Tilak Launched the Kesari for securing independence for the country. His wish was fulfilled, though not during his life-time. It is a historical record of 125 years, of the political, economic, social and cultural revival of the whole nation. Lokmanya's 'Kesari' has been a witness to the period of not less than three centuries. The 'Kesari' has pursued this course with the aim of 'Swaraj' (self-government) in the pre-independence period and 'Suraj' (good-governance) in the post-independence period. There is no aspect of the people's life in Maharashtra that has not been influenced by the 'Kesari' in its own way. It has made a strong impact in the field of politics, social issues, literature, philosophy, sports, science, entertainment, education, agriculture, industry and so on. The 'Kesari's' work was not restricted to the limits of Maharashtra alone. In Lokmanya Tilak's freedom movement, it was a weapon, employed for bringing about awakening among the masses. The 'Mahratta', 'Kesari's' elder sibling, conveyed in English the ideas and thoughts of Lokmanya and other writers to the far corners of the nation. Thus, the 'Kesari' remained on the forefront in the great mass movement raised against the British. The 'Kesari', in fact, became a symbol of the freedom movement. For some time 'Kesari' was published in Hindi and Gujarati as well. It came to be viewed as the newspaper with the fighting spirit, the newspaper that raised voice against injustice, facing dauntlessly the calamities befalling due to the wrath of the imperialists and still voicing its opinions boldly and independently. This tough and dedicated work generated love and pride in the minds of the people regarding the 'Kesari'. Even after independence, the 'Kesari' has made remarkable contribution to many a mass movement and also to the work of building Modern India.

For the initial six years, Lokmanya Tilak was the editor of the 'Mahratta' while Gopal Ganesh Agarkar was the editor of the 'Kesari'. Lokmanya Tilak took the charge as the editor of the 'Kesari' on 25th October 1887. The articles of both Tilak and Agarkar would get published in both the newspapers. Ideological differences between the two can also be seen in them. However, since

14th September 1891, Tilak became the legal owner of both the newspapers and the 'Kesari' acquired its independent identity.

Objectives of the 'Kesari'

The objectives of the newspaper have been stated in the first issue of 'Kesari'.

"----- opening a press and starting a newspaper became a business. It is generally observed that these two valuable instruments have fallen in the hands of those who have not received adequate education."

"----- a newspaper is useful in two ways. Firstly, if the newspapers carry out their duty impartially and dauntlessly, government officials are filled with awe. The purpose that is served, in the night, by lighting the street lamps or by the continuous patrolling of the police, is the purpose that is served by the incessant penmanship of journalists." (Translated (Tilak, 1881)).

Lokmanya Tilak made use of 'Kesari' for bringing about political consciousness among the masses for the purpose of the freedom struggle, for giving a new direction to their thinking and for boosting the different agitation and programmes initiated by him. The four-fold programme of 'Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education' that Tilak offered to the Congress and to the whole nation, was strongly upheld by 'Kesari'. This very same four-point programme continued to be the policy-principle of 'Kesari' even after achieving independence.

'Swa' in 'Swaraj' mean our own people. Thus, by 'Swaraj' Tilak expected the rule of the people, that is, democracy. 'Swadeshi' meant the growth of indigenous industry, agriculture and commerce by which the money generated in the country would remain in the country and would be utilized for our own country. 'Boycott' was meant to be a mass movement which signified boycotting everything that was contrary to the interests of the country. Lastly, 'national education' was the education that would arouse patriotism among students and would also provide them training in business, commerce and research that would lead to the progress of the country. By education, Tilak expected modern education imparted along with the education of ancient Indian knowledge and culture.

'Kesari' has pursued this four-fold programme for the last 141 years. During this course it has written quite forthrightly on politics, democracy, agriculture, industry, commerce, social issues such as inequality in all its forms, the education system and so on. This is the basic objective of the 'Kesari', visualized by Lokmanya Tilak.

Court Cases on Kesari

As a result of the fearless and impartial writings 'Kesari' had to face many cases. 'Kesari' suffered the rage of the British Rulers in the pre-independence days and also of the power-intoxicated rulers after independence. Many a times 'Kesari' had to furnish circulation and the editors to suffer imprisonment. 'Kesari' has got the heritage of sacrifice for the interest of the nation.

Lokmanya Tilak and Kesari were prosecuted many a times. However two amongst them are of great importance on a charge of seditions first in 1897 and the second in 1908. The British bureaucrats were really angry by the articles which criticized the repression let loose in Pune and so many other towns of Maharashtra during the 1897 plague epidemic. The 'Suspension of Land Revenue' campaign started by 'Kesari' also incurred the wrath, of the British rulers. The murder of Rand at Ganeshkhind in Pune ultimately unhinged the mind of the Government and they at last launched prosecution against Lokmanya. This is the first prosecution of sedition. This resulted in 18 months' rigorous imprisonment for Lokmanya Tilak.

The second prosecution on the charge of sedition was in the year 1908. This has got a background of the participation of Bengal Region mooted by the Governor General 'Lord Curzon'. Following the bomb blast at Muzaffarpur, an engine of repression was let loose in Bengal. Nobody could hear except arrests, conspiracy and murders there.

In this very critical situation Lokmanya Tilak reviewed the development concerning Bengal in four famous articles in Kesari captioned as-

- 1) 'Misfortune of the Nation'
- 2) 'Double warning'
- 3) 'What the bomb blast really means'
- 4) 'These Remedies Not Durable'

Sedition charge of second prosecution was based on the first and fourth articles as above. Naturally, as expected Lokmanya was convicted and sentenced to six years imprisonment. He was, then sent to Mandalay prison in Myanmar (Burma). Difficulties like these, however, could not discourage the spirit of Lokmanya and his 'Kesari'.

Heritage Of Nationalism And Sacrifices

The editors who followed Lokmanya, had on several occasions, had to face the displeasure of the British Government and even after independence, the displeasure of the National Government for fighting against injustice. Following the emergency of the Press Act of 1910 'Kesari' was asked to furnish a surety of Rs. 5,000/- and the 'Mahratta' of Rs. 10,000/-. At this time Lokmanya was confined in the Mandalay Jail. The instructions, on the above background, issued by him from his Cell to the editors of 'Kesari' and 'Mahratta', then proved very useful and well guiding to the editors when Press Censorship was imposed sixty five years later in June 1975. Lokmanya had, at that time said :

"Whatever you want to say should be in the frame work of the Law. Because the Law is unable to save you from the repressive measures of the Government. You must, therefore, not lose the weapon you wield". This was the foresight of Lokmanya.

Irritants of the Press Act started after 1897. The Act was promulgated first in 1910 and then in the year 1930. Two other editions of the said Act were enforced in the form of Ordinances. The 'Kesari', however, because of its fearless writings, became a nuisance to the law-enforcing-authorities. At the same time adherence to 'truth' by the 'Kesari' proved responsible for the progressive modifications of the clauses concerning freedom of 'Speech' and 'expression' on which was ultimately enshrined in the constitution as a fundamental rights in the wake of independence. Emergency was declared in 1975 followed by Press Censorship. During this delicate period 'Kesari' had to suffer several hardships. The later editors of 'Kesari' Shri. J. S. Karandikar, D. V. Gokhale, Shri G. V. Ketkar also participated like Lokmanya and Kelkar, in the national struggle for freedom. They were the heroes of non-cooperation movement. As well as they were the Secretaries of Maharashtra Congress Committee J. S. Karandikar had to suffer three months' rigorous imprisonment in 1922. D. R. Gokhale was incarcerated for eight months in 1930, while G. V. Ketkar suffered 9 months' imprisonment in the same year. Shri. Bhopatkar was convicted an imprisonment for participating in Bhoga nagar agitation. Shri. Ketkar, again, fought against the Rozakari actions in Hyderabad. Shri. S. V. Modals, one of the trustees, sentenced to imprisonment for social activities. Shri. J. S. Tilak - editor/Trustee, along with Shri. Rambhau Mandalik, had to pay the penalty of a fine for revolting the arrest of four Brahmins and four Mahars who were illegally arrested in connection with the theft of the IDOL of Bhawani Mata from the Jalmandir Palace, Satara. He also suffered three months imprisonment during the Belgaum Boundary Agitation.

Kesari participated with all its strength in the struggle of Goa Liberation Agitation conducted by all the political parties. Shri. Jayantrao Tilak, editor of 'Kesari', was the General Secretary of 'Goa Vimochan sahayak Samittee'. In this capacity as a G. Secretary, Shri. Jayantrao Tilak always remained in front for fighting the battle. Shri. P. S. Kulkarni, Trustee of Kesari, also participated in it and seriously suffered physical torture in the movement. Kesari Wada, the generator of Political Movement, became the battle field at the Goa Liberation Agitation.

Fearless Tradition of Editors

Roaring against the British Rule , 'Kesari' has proved to be a valuable treasure by its fearless and bold Editors. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar ,the first Editor of 'Kesari' was a Social Reformer, Lokmanya Tilak the next editor belonged to fiery party. The responsibility of editorship of 'Kesari' was ably shouldered by N. C. Kelkar first, after the demise of Lokmanya Tilak and subsequently by K. P. Khadilkar. After Khadilkar editor's role was successfully performed by stalwart editors J. S. Karandikar and Baburao Gokhale thereafter the responsibility fell on G. V. Ketkar who was a capable editor. His articles exhibited his minute study of Bhagwat Geeta. After Ketkar, Jayantrao Tilak, grandson of Lokmanya Tilak, adored the editorship. During the region Kesari was transformed by various angles. Kesari which was weekly became a Daily.

After Jayantrao Tilak, Chandrakant Ghorpade and S. D. Gokhale held the post of editor. Arvind Gokhale, well known critic of international affairs, increased the readership of 'Kesari' by his thought-provoking articles. Presently Dr. Deepak Tilak is the editor of 'Kesari'. He is considered as an authority both in the fields of editorship and management. He made Kesari popular by issuing number of special supplements on various subjects of people's intimacy. Besides he started utilizing the most modern technology eg. T.V., Internet edition, Kesari-digital and 'Kesari' has now flourished in all fields with dignity.

Today 'Kesari' has advanced further in its course of publishing. At present there is a curiosity to get acquainted with the news every day. In the near future people are going to read the latest news even twice or thrice during the day. Time and tide wait for no man. It is a natural law, ruthless though it is that the one who stops gets perished. The 'Kesari's motto of "speaking fearlessly and forthrightly" is strictly followed even in the daily 'Kesari'. 'Kesari' has been one of the pioneers in adopting the latest techniques such as photo-composing, off-set, coloured printing, DTP etc. Changeability without impairing the basic aim and objective has been the secret of the 'Kesari's continued journey of 141 years.

'Kesari's Social Service

During Lokmanya's lifetime 'Kesari' made considerable contribution to the work of collecting subscriptions for the Raigad Memorial Fund, Paisa Fund etc. The repayment of the Chirol Fund raised later was also made along with interest through Tilak Purse Fund established out of its profit. The interest coming out of this fund of Rs. 4.5 lakhs has been utilized and is still being utilized every year for providing financial assistance ranging from Rs. 15000/- to 45000/- to various institutions in Western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Karnataka. 'Kesari' also started the practice of giving 'Kelkar Award' every year to the Best Book in Marathi language in memory of Late N. C. Kelkar. Cash Prizes are being awarded to eminent personalities from various fields, in order to appreciate and encourage their constructive work for the benefit of the society. Awards are being conferred upon both - individuals and institutions - in memory of late Mrs. Indutai Tilak and Late Mrs. Gauri Tilak. An award is being given also in memory of late Dr. R. V. Wardekar, the 'Kesari' Trustee and an internationally known personality in the field of Leprosy Eradication. Whenever people were affected by a calamity - whether it was the drought that hit Maharashtra in 1952 and 1971 or the flood caused in the year 1961 or earthquake in Koyana Nagar area in 1967 or when the Jamuna-flood had devastated the life of the people in 1978 Kesari keeping its own problems aside have helped the needy. Kesari also provided financial assistance to the families of the martyrs who had laid down their lives in the Kargil War , all these incidents indicate the social and kinship feeling with which the 'Kesari' has always volunteered to help.

However provision of food, clothing and shelter alone cannot fulfil all the needs of a society. There are some requirements that are beyond these basic needs. In order to fulfil such needs, 'Kesari' has constructed a 'Community Hall' in Beed and has established 'Lokmanya Library' in Vidarbha. On each of these occasions the 'Kesari' has made its own contribution to this fund and also provided valuable space in the 'Kesari' for giving publicity to this Fund.

Thought Provoking Movement

The 'Kesari' is not just a newspaper. It is a thought provoking movement. The fly-wheel in a factory sets in motion smaller wheels in the factory. Similarly, the Kesari has been a fly-wheel set in motion by Lokmanya Tilak and other institutions like Shuddha Panchang Samiti, Raigad Memorial, Anath Hindu Mahilashram, Vakrutvottejak Sabha, Vasant Vyakhyanmala, Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, the Bank of Maharashtra, Maharashtra Mandal, Brihan Maharashtra Parishad, Tilak Smarak Mandir, Shri Shivaji Mandir, Poona Judo Association, The Rose Society, Tilak Hall, Vedshastrottejak Sabha, Tilak Purse Fund, Tilak Punyitheer Mandal, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Jungle Lovers Association, Veer Sawarkar Smarak, Lt. Col. Deodhar Trust, Mahila Punarvasan Kendra, Pune Aitihāsik Vastu Smritee etc. have grown and are prospering with the help of Kesari. The Kesari illustrates the classical description of the 'Multi-headed, multi-eyed and multi-legged 'Purusha'.

Reconstruction of Indian Life

Lokmanya Tilak launched the 'Kesari' for securing independence for the country. His wish was fulfilled, though not during his life-time. The kind of democracy which Lokmanya Tilak envisaged for the country, came into being with the setting up of the National Parliament. In the manifesto of his Democratic Swarajya Party, Lokmanya Tilak had emphasised the linguistic reconstitution of the provinces, minimum wages for land labourers and nationalisation of the railways and basic industries. All these objectives have been achieved. 'Kesari' has pleaded the cause of the workers whenever it was justified. Swadeshi was one of the four-points of the programme advocated by Lokmanya's emphasis on this principle gave an impetus to the industrialisation of the country. 'Kesari' congratulated the Mundhwa Paper Mills when it manufactured the first indigenous paper in Pune. The said article was printed on the newly manufactured indigenous paper itself. The first Cotton Mill in Pune was emerged in the year 1893 when 'Kesari' welcomed it through an Article headed by 'Punyateel Pahilee Chimani'.

The necessity of capital required for industrialization of Maharashtra was compensated by the Co-operation Movement advocated through 'Kesari' and under the guidance of L. B. Bhopatkar, Dhananjayrao Gadgil and D. V. Gokhale the Co-operative Movement reached the nook and corner of Maharashtra and it has occupied lions share in the improvement of Rural Area. The present sugar factories in Maharashtra and their rich surroundings is the outcome of philosophy of co-operation preached by Dhananjayrao Gadgil.

Because of the thought-provoking base of national education provided by Lokmanya Tilak, education was spread and not only the schools, colleges and Universities were established but now even the thought of complete Indianization of education is foremost. For many years 'Kesari' was demanding separate University for Maharashtra. As a result, it was successful; and the Pune University and the Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth were established. Boycott, one of the four pillars advocated by Lokmanya were ultimately transformed into Satyagraha and the people used it as a weapon for counteracting injustice.

'Kesari' has always retaliated the injustice - may it be in the Political field, social, Government or educational fields. 'Kesari' countermanded injustice according to its mite and has helped reestablishment and upliftment of Maharashtra.

Conclusion

'Kesari' is a huge banyan tree. It grew flowers in the form of 'Swarajya', but its fruits in the form of 'Surajya' are yet to be tasted. Many institutions and movements germinated under the shelter of this banyan tree, they grew and prospered. Their sweet fruits have enabled the upliftment of the Bharatiya community life. Right from the emergence of 'Kesari' from 1881 to 1920 Lokmanya shouldered the responsibility up to his last breath.

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