A Great Mind, a Great Will

A GREAT mind, a great will, a great and pre-eminent leader of men has passed away from the field of his achievement and labour. To the mind of his country Lokamanya Tilak was much more, for he had become to it a considerable part of itself, the embodiment of its past effort, and the head of its present will and struggle for a free and greater life. His achievement and personality have put him amidst the first rank of historic and significant figures. He was one who built much rapidly out of little beginnings, a creator of great things out of an unworked material. The creations he left behind him were a new and strong and self-reliant national spirit, the reawakened political mind and life of a people, a will to freedom and action, a great national purpose. He brought to his work extraordinary qualities, a calm, silent, unflinching courage, an unwavering purpose, a flexible mind, a forward-casting vision of possibilities, an eye for the occasion, a sense of actuality, a fine capacity of democratic leadership, a diplomacy that never lost sight of its aim and pressed towards it even in the most pliant turns of its movement, and guiding all, a single-minded patriotism that cared for power and influence only as a means of service to the Motherland and a lever for the work of her liberation. He sacrificed much for her and suffered for her repeatedly and made no ostentation of his suffering and sacrifice. His life was a constant offering at her altar and his death has come in the midst of an unceasing service and labour.

The passing of this great personality creates a large and immediate void that will be felt acutely for a time, but it is the virtue of his own work that this vacancy must very soon be filled by new men and new forces. The spirit he created in the country is of that sincere, real and fruitful kind that cannot consent to cease or to fail, but must always throw up minds and
capacities that will embody its purpose. It will raise up others of his mould, if not of his stature, to meet its needs, its demands, its call for ability and courage. He himself has only passed behind the veil, for death, and not life, is the illusion. The strong spirit that dwelt within him ranges now freed from our human and physical limitations, and can still shed upon us, on those now at work, and those who are coming, a more subtle, ample and irresistible influence; and even if this were not so, an effective part of him is still with us. His will is left behind in many to make more powerful and free from hesitations the national will he did so much to create, the growing will, whose strength and single wholeness are the chief conditions of the success of the national effort. His courage is left behind in numbers to fuse itself into and uplift and fortify the courage of his people; his sacrifice and strength in suffering are left with us to enlarge themselves, more even than in his lifetime, and to heighten the fine and steeled temper our people need for the difficult share that still lies before their endeavour. These things are his legacy to his country, and it is in proportion as each man rises to the height of what they signify that his life will be justified and assured of its recompense.

Methods and policies may change but the spirit of what Lokamanya Tilak was and did remains and will continue to be needed, a constant power in others for the achievement of his own life’s grand and single purpose. A great worker and creator is not to be judged only by the work he himself did, but also by the greater work he made possible. The achievement of the departed leader has brought the nation to a certain point. Its power to go forward from and beyond that point, to face new circumstances, to rise to the more strenuous and momentous demand of its future will be the greatest and surest sign of the soundness of his labour. That test is being applied to the national movement at the very moment of his departure.

The death of Lokamanya Tilak comes upon us at a time when the country is passing through most troubled and poignant hours. It occurs at a critical period, it coincides even with a crucial moment when questions are being put to the nation by
the Master of Destiny, on the answer to which depends the whole spirit, virtue and meaning of its future. In each event that confronts us there is a divine significance, and the passing away at such a time of such a man, on whose thought and decision thousands hung, should make more profoundly felt by the people, by every man in the nation, the great, the almost religious responsibility that lies upon him personally.

At this juncture it is not for me to prejudge the issue; each must meet it according to his light and conscience. This at least can be demanded of every man who would be worthy of India and of her great departed son that he shall put away from him in the decision of the things to be done in the future, all weakness of will, all defect of courage, all unwillingness for sacrifice. Let each strive to see with that selfless impersonality taught by one of our greatest scriptures which can alone enable us to identify ourselves both with the Divine Will and with the soul of our Mother. Two things India demands for her future, the freedom of soul, life and action needed for the work she has to do for mankind; and the understanding by her children of that work and of her own true spirit that the future India may be indeed India. The first seems still the main sense and need of the present moment, but the second is also involved in it — a yet greater issue. On the spirit of our decisions now and in the next few years depends the truth, vitality and greatness of our future national existence. It is the beginning of a great self-determination not only in the external but in the spiritual. These two thoughts should govern our action. Only so can the work done by Lokamanya Tilak find its true continuation and issue.