



BIPIN CHANDRA PAL



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

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Bipin Chandra Pal was among the foremost leaders of the Nationalist Movement in India. One of the triumvirate of the three great freedom fighters, popularly known as—“Lal Bal Pal”, he stood strong by the idea of *Swaraj* or complete political freedom, which could only be achieved through courage, self-help and self-sacrifice. Bipin Chandra Pal was a multi-faceted personality and his talent was well reflected in his various vocations as a Teacher, Journalist, Writer, Orator, Librarian, Social and Political Activist. A torch-bearer of the renaissance in Bengal, he cultivated the spirit of protest and criticism against the social dogmas and conservatism in the minds of the people. He initially joined *Brahmo Samaj*, turned to Vedanta and ended up as an upholder of the *Vaishnava* philosophy of Sri Chaitanya.

Bipin Chandra was born on 7 November 1858 at Poil village in Sylhet District, now in Bangladesh to Shri Ram Chandra Pal and Smt. Narayanee. In 1866, he was sent to an English school in the town of Sylhet. Thereafter, he attended two missionary schools and later passed the entrance examination of the Calcutta University from the Sylhet Government High School in 1874. Bipin Chandra went to Calcutta* for higher studies and joined the Presidency College in 1875. During the next four years at Calcutta University, he experienced the gradual emergence of India's new national consciousness. He read extensively in his school and college days and acquired a literary taste and competence. He was fond of Bengali literature, particularly Bengali poetry and fiction. Among English writers, Emerson and Theodore Parker were his favourites.

Bipin Chandra started his career as a headmaster of a high school in Cuttack in 1879. He also seriously took up journalism, and started the Bengali weekly *Paridarshak* in Sylhet in 1880, and later served as Assistant Editor of the *Bengal Public Opinion* and the *Tribune* (Lahore). For a year and a half, he also acted

*Now known as Kolkata.

as the Librarian and Secretary of the Calcutta Public Library (1890-91).

During his student days in Calcutta, Bipin Chandra came in contact with many eminent people. They include: Shri Keshub Chander Sen, the great Brahmo leader, who inspired him to join the Brahmo Samaj movement; Shri Sivanath Sastri who imbued him with the spirit of freedom, individualism and patriotism, and Shri Bijay Krishna Goswami who later moulded his spiritual life to a significant extent.

In politics, Bipin Chandra was initially influenced by and accepted Surendranath Banerjea as his *guru*; but later he worked in collaboration with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo Ghosh. In the autumn of 1877, he was invited by Sivanath Sastri as the member of a group, which combined the social and religious idealism of the Brahmo Samaj with the political idealism of Surendranath Banerjea and the Indian Association. The association of Bipin Chandra Pal with the Indian National Congress started from the very second session held in Calcutta in 1886, which he joined as a delegate from Sylhet. Bipin Chandra vociferously asserted the rights of the Indians in the third session of the Congress at Madras in 1887 by seconding the resolution for the repeal of the Arms Act, 1887. He criticized the Act for its undemocratic and discriminatory provisions regarding possession and carrying of arms by the Indians. In the fourth session of the Congress, Bipin Chandra supported the resolution on a commission to enquire into industrial condition and technical education in the country.

In 1898, Bipin Chandra went to England for theological studies on a scholarship granted by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. But he gave up his scholarship after a year and started working for the cause of freedom of India. In 1900, he returned to India imbued with a great patriotic fervour and plunged into the freedom movement of his country. Through his weekly journal, the *New India* (1901), he proclaimed secularism, rationalism and nationalism. He did not agree with Tilak's concept of Hindu nationalism, but preached a "composite patriotism" which was better suited for a country like India with so many diversities. In 1906, after a year of the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon, Bipin Chandra started a Nationalist daily

paper, the *Bande Mataram*. The doctrines of passive resistance, boycott of English goods, severance of all association with the foreign Government in the country and national education were fervently preached by Bipin Chandra during his memorable tour of Bengal, Assam, U.P. and Madras in 1907. The British Government started regarding him as their enemy. He was imprisoned for six months on his refusal to give evidence against Aurobindo Ghosh in the so-called *Bande Mataram* sedition case. On coming out of prison, he left for England to lead the life of an enforced exile in August 1908.

During his three years' sojourn in England (1908-11), Bipin Chandra developed a new political thought which he called the Empire-idea. He pleaded for reconstitution of the British empire as a federal union in which India, Great Britain and all the British self-governing colonies would co-operate as equal and free partners. On coming back to India he started a monthly journal, the *Hindu Review* (1913), and tried to popularize this idea. He then joined the Home Rule Movement of Smt. Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

After the First World War, he again visited England as a member of Congress deputation led by Tilak for placing India's political demand before the Joint Parliamentary Committee. The Bolshevik Revolution (1917) in Russia also appealed to his mind and he described it as marking the birth of a new world. He came back to India in 1919 and presided over the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Barisal in 1921. However, due to difference of opinion with other Congress leaders, he practically retired from active politics though he continued to express his views on national issues through books and articles till his death on 20 May 1932.

Aurobindo Ghosh rightly described Bipin Chandra as one of the mightiest prophets of nationalism. He strongly advocated the ideal of complete independence long before the Congress accepted it as its goal. But, as he asserted in his Barisal address of 1921, he did not want India to grow up as another centralized class-ruled State like England, France or Japan. He stood for a federal Indian republic in which each Province (linguistically reorganized), each district and even each village would enjoy a large degree of local autonomy.

Politics apart, the versatility of Bipin Chandra encompasses his original contribution to many disciplines of human knowledge such as social, political and speculative philosophy, literature and literary criticism, comparative religion, social history and biographical sketches. The dictum 'pen is mightier than sword' is perhaps true in respect of Bipin Chandra, whose writings and speeches in Bengali and English bear remarkable testimony to his profound command over Bengali and English languages and also to his erudition and freehand expressions.

He wrote on the philosophy of Bengal Vaishnavism, gave exposition of some of the fundamental aspects of Indian culture and contributed a series of studies on the lives of great makers of modern India like Raja Rammohun Roy, Keshub Chander Sen, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, Asutosh Mukherjee and Annie Besant. He also published a biography of Queen Victoria in Bengali and his own autobiography *Memories of My Life and Times* (1932).

His independent spirit led him to revolt quite early in his life against social evils like caste system, widow remarriage, etc. under the banner of the *Brahmo Samaj*. He demonstrated the sincerity of his belief by marrying an inter-caste widow. By lending his powerful support to the Age of Consent Bill (1891) he completely alienated the social conservatives. His concern for the poor and the downtrodden led him to champion the cause of the Assam tea-garden labourers in the last quarter of the 19th century. In his book, *The New Economic Menace of India*, he demanded increased wages and shorter hours of work for the Indian labourers. He not only gave the Bengali labour journal, *Samhati* its name, but also helped it with contributions from his pen. He was a strong votary for reorganizing the educational system on national lines. He joined the movement for national education in Bengal and was associated with the National Council of Education from its very inception.

Bipin Chandra, the orator, is perhaps a rare example of how human voice could outreach crowded mass meetings of several thousands. He possessed a thunderous voice and the unique skill to hypnotize a huge gathering simply by oration.

Bipin Chandra has established a permanent place in the galaxy of outstanding leaders who contributed their best to the development of progressive thought and movements in India during her struggle for social and political freedoms.

[The Portrait of Bipin Chandra Pal, painted by Prof. Zagar Zahoor, Head of the Department of Applied Arts, Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi, will be unveiled by the Speaker, Lok Sabha, Shri Somnath Chatterjee. The Portrait has been donated by the Bipin Chandra Pal Memorial Trust, New Delhi.]