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B.G. Kher

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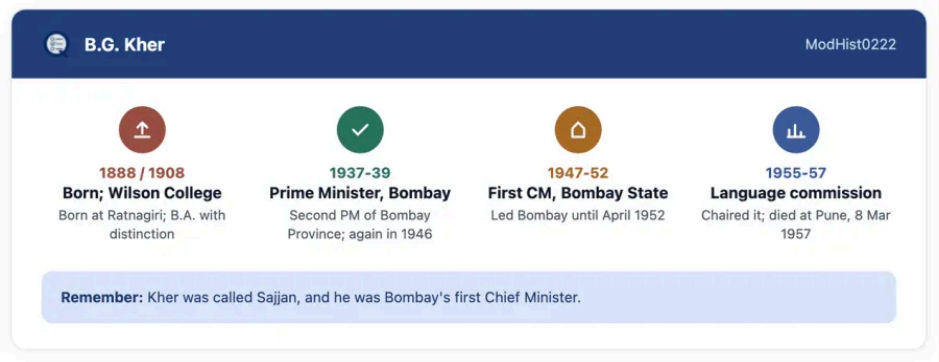
B.G. Kher

People in Bombay had a nickname for him. They called him “Sajjan”, which means good and gentle. Balasaheb Gangadhar Kher earned it through honesty and modesty.

He was a lawyer by choice and a politician by need. He led Bombay twice before independence, and then became its first Chief Minister.



B. G. Kher on a 1989 Indian commemorative postage stamp. GODL-India, via Wikimedia Commons.



Four turning points in the life of B. G. Kher.

Born. 24 August 1888, Ratnagiri.
Nickname. Sajjan, meaning good and gentle.
First term. Prime Minister of Bombay Province, 1937 to 1939.
First CM. Bombay State, until April 1952.
Honour. Padma Vibhushan, 1954.
Died. 8 March 1957, Pune.

Sajjan: a Marathi and Hindi word for a good, gentle person.

Premier: the old title for the head of a provincial government.

Official Language Commission: a body that studied how to move official work from English to Hindi.

1 How did a Ratnagiri boy become a lawyer?

Kher was born on 24 August 1888 at Ratnagiri. He spent some boyhood years at Kundgol, in Jamkhandi State. Later he moved to Pune to study at the New English School. Accounts say the reformer Gopal Krishna Gokhale pushed this move.

He joined Wilson College in Mumbai. He took his B.A. with high distinction in 1908. He also stood first in Sanskrit and won a prize for it.

He trained as a lawyer. With Manilal Nanavati he started a firm, Manilal Kher and Company. It began work on 7 June 1918. His career in law was already strong when politics called.

- Born **24 August 1888** at **Ratnagiri**.
- Studied in Pune; moved there at the push of **Gokhale**, per accounts.
- B.A. from **Wilson College**, **1908**.
- Law firm **Manilal Kher and Company**, **1918**.

> **Quick check 1.** Kher was the first Chief Minister of Madras. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 How did he enter politics and prison?

Kher's public career began in 1922. He became Secretary of the Bombay branch of the Swaraj Party. That party was founded by leaders such as Chittaranjan Das.

During civil disobedience he was jailed twice. In 1930 he got eight months of rigorous imprisonment. In 1932 he got two years. He was arrested again in 1940.

In August 1942 the Quit India movement began. Police arrested him again. He was freed on 14 July 1944.

- Joined politics in **1922**: Secretary, **Swaraj Party**, Bombay.
- Jailed in **1930** (eight months) and **1932** (two years).
- Arrested in **Quit India**, **August 1942**; freed **1944**.
- Read about Chittaranjan Das.

3 What did he do as Premier and CM?

The Government of India Act of 1935 brought elected provincial governments. Kher became the second Prime Minister of Bombay Province in 1937. He followed Dhanjishah Cooper. He stayed until November 1939.

He took office again on 30 March 1946. After independence he is called the first Chief Minister of Bombay State. Sources differ on the exact date the title changed from Premier. The legacy view says it happened when the Constitution took effect on 26 January 1950. Either way, he stayed in office until April 1952.

His government helped set up Poona University in 1949. Today it is the Savitribai Phule Pune University. A building on its campus, Kher Bhavan, carries his name.

In 1950 and 1951 he gave plots in Bandra East to the Hindu-Khatik community. That area is still called Kherwadi. He also supported schools, a hospital, water and electricity for its people.

- Prime Minister of Bombay Province from **1937**; again from **30 March 1946**.
- First Chief Minister of **Bombay State**; in office until **April 1952**.
- Helped found **Poona University**, **1949**.
- Land to **Hindu-Khatik** families; **Kherwadi**.
- Read about the Government of India Act 1935.

> **Quick check 2.** Kher chaired the Official Language Commission appointed in 1955. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

4 What did the language commission say?

In 1955 President Rajendra Prasad appointed Kher to head the Official Language Commission. Its job was to study how Hindi could replace English in official work. The commission gave its report in July 1956.

The report did not call for an overnight switch. It urged a gradual, phased shift from English to Hindi. This matters for exams. Many students mix it up with the 1965 anti-Hindi agitation, which came nine years later.

- Appointed chairman in **1955**; report in **1956**.
- Advice: a **gradual** shift from **English** to **Hindi**.
- The **1965** agitation came **later**.
- Read about the 1965 anti-Hindi agitation.

5 How is he remembered?

Kher won the Padma Vibhushan in 1954. Accounts say he also served as India's High Commissioner in London for two years after leaving office. He sat in the Constituent Assembly, too.

In 1976 Little Gibbs Road on Malabar Hill was renamed B.G. Kher Marg. He died on 8 March 1957 in Pune while recovering from an asthma attack. Even the British noted his honesty. Declassified MI5 files praised his sincerity.

- **Padma Vibhushan**, **1954**.
- Road renamed **B.G. Kher Marg** in **1976**.
- Died **8 March 1957**, Pune.
- Known for **honesty** and **modesty**.

6 What are the exam traps?

Each state's first Chief Minister is a favourite mix-up. Keep Kher separate from the others.

- Kher: **Bombay**. Reddiyar: **Madras**. Bhargava: **Punjab**.
- He held two titles: **Prime Minister** of the Province, then **Chief Minister**.
- His language commission is **1955**, not **1965**.
- Read about Gopi Chand Bhargava and O. P. Ramaswamy Reddiyar.

Remember: Kher was Bombay's first Chief Minister and was called Sajjan. He chaired the 1955 Official Language Commission, which urged a gradual shift to Hindi.

Think it through: Why would a commission urge a gradual move to Hindi, not a quick one?

India has many languages, and English was in daily use in courts and offices. A sudden switch would have hurt people who did not speak Hindi. A phased change gave time to adjust.

Quick check 3. The Official Language Commission urged an immediate switch to Hindi. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Practice MCQs

1. B.G. Kher was the first Chief Minister of which state?

A. Bombay State

B. Madras

C. Uttar Pradesh

D. Madhya Pradesh

See answer ↓

2. B.G. Kher was widely known by which nickname, meaning 'good and gentle'?

A. Lokmanya

B. Deshbandhu

C. Sardar

D. Sajjan

See answer ↓

3. Which university did B.G. Kher help establish, in 1949?

A. Bombay University

B. Gujarat University

C. Nagpur University

D. Poona University (now Savitribai Phule Pune University)

See answer ↓

4. What honour did B.G. Kher receive from the Government of India, in 1954?

A. Bharat Ratna

B. Padma Vibhushan

C. Padma Bhushan

D. Padma Shri

See answer ↓

5. In which Bombay Presidency town was B.G. Kher born, on 24 August 1888?

A. Satara

B. Ratnagiri

C. Nashik

D. Pune

See answer ↓

6. Whom did B. G. Kher succeed as Prime Minister of Bombay Province in 1937?

A. Morarji Desai

B. Jamnadas Mehta

C. K. M. Munshi

D. Dhanjishah Cooper

See answer ↓

7. Which road on Malabar Hill in Mumbai was renamed B. G. Kher Marg in 1976?

A. Marine Drive

B. Nepean Sea Road

C. Little Gibbs Road

D. Altamount Road

See answer ↓

8. Which commission, set up in 1955, did B. G. Kher chair?

A. The States Reorganisation Commission

B. The Finance Commission

C. The University Education Commission

D. The Official Language Commission

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.** B.G. Kher was the first Chief Minister of Bombay State, a tri-lingual state that once covered present-day Maharashtra and Gujarat. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** Kher was widely known by the nickname 'Sajjan,' meaning good and gentle, for his reputation of honesty and modesty. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** As Chief Minister, Kher was instrumental in establishing Poona University, now known as Savitribai Phule Pune University, in 1949. ↑ Q3
4. **B.** B.G. Kher was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, in 1954. ↑ Q4
5. **B.** Balasaheb Gangadhar Kher was born on 24 August 1888, at Ratnagiri, in the Bombay Presidency. ↑ Q5
6. **D.** Kher became the second Prime Minister of the Bombay Province in 1937. He followed Dhanjishah Cooper and served until November 1939. ↑ Q6
7. **C.** The road was renamed in Kher's honour in 1976. His name also lives on in Kherwadi and in Kher Bhavan at Pune university. ↑ Q7
8. **D.** Kher chaired the Official Language Commission, set up in 1955. It recommended a gradual shift from English to Hindi in official use. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **False.** ↑ 3

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