

Gokhaleana Number Six. May 9th 1970

A SHEAF OF ANECDOTES - 1

On Gokhale Day 9th May, 1970.

Collected and published by
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FOREWORD

These anecdotes and reminiscences about Gokhale are from the collection of press cuttings extracts from books and pamphlets published about Gokhale since 1915 as well as the notes of interviews I had with Gokhale's friends, colleagues and contemporaries, since I joined the servants of India Society in 1927.

When the late Rt. Hon V. S. Srinivasa Sastri undertook to deliver the Mysore University Lectures on Gokhale in 1935, thinking that my collection of material about Gokhale, would be of help to him, I casually mentioned about them to Sastri. When he visited the Servants of India Society, before going to Coimbatore, he looked at the material, which were in manuscript. On reaching Coimbatore he wrote to me the following letter.

Srinivasapuram,
Coimbatore. 5-8-33.

Dear Venkataramaier,

You 've taken enormous pains about the Gokhale, references. Of course I w'd like what you got from Gokhale's friends. Please send a typed copy.
I am very grateful to you.

Yrs affly,
V. S. SRINIVASAN

Accordingly I did send him typed copies of the entire Gokhale material I had with me, though he did not use them fully in his Mysore lectures. Again when he delivered his lecture on *Gokhale: the less known aspects,*" at the Servants of India Society Royapettah on 19-2-1945 again he made use of some more of the Gokhale materials that I had collected.

The sources of these anecdotes, are given in appropriate places.

S. R. Venkataraman.

SIS. Royapettah, Madras-14.
9-5-1970.

HOMAGE

Heroic Heart, Lost hope of all our days !
Need's thou the homage of our love or praise ?
No ! Let the mournful millions round thy pyre
Kindle their souls with consecrated fire,
Caught from the brave torch fallen from thy hand,
To succour and to serve our stricken land,
And in a daily worship taught by thee,
Upbuild the temple of her unity.

—SAROJINI NAIDU

Gokhale's treasured memento

When Gokhale came to South Africa he had with him a scarf which was a gift from Mahadev Govind Ranade. He treasured the memento with utmost care and used it only on special occasions. One such occasion was the banquet given in his honour by the Johannesburg Indians. The scarf was creased and needed ironing. It was not possible to send it to the laundry and get it back in time. I offered to try my art.

'I can trust to your capacity as a lawyer, but not as a washerman,' said Gokhale. 'What if you should spoil it? Do you know what it means to me?'

With this he narrated with much joy, the story of the gift. I still insisted, guaranteed good work, got his permission to iron it, and won his certificate. After that I did not mind if the rest of the world refused me its certificate.

—MAHATMA GANDHI

Gokhale knew his text-books by heart

Some of the text-books that Gokhale had to study, he knew by heart". To substantiate this, Gokhale's son-in-law, Sri S. B. Dhavale, I.C.S. (Retired), a former Judge of the Patna High Court, narrated an incident which was told him by one of Gokhale's class-mates by name, Savardekar, several decades ago. Once Gokhale could not answer

a question put by his master satisfactorily and got himself demoted in the class. Gokhale took this to heart and in anger tore his text-book to pieces. A little later, when he was composed, he realised his predicament. He had no money to purchase a new book. Then he went to his brother—student Savardekar and narrated to him his predicament and wanted a loan of his text-book for only a couple of days, as he could not tax his brother who was already bearing the burden of educating him out of his meagre earnings, for the purchase of a new book and therefore begged him to loan the book. Savardekar lent it. Gokhale got by heart the entire book in a couple of days and had no need to read it afterwards.—Mr. Dhavale, Interviewed by SRV.

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Refused promotion

One day when he was still at school an exercise in Algebra was given to him along with his class fellows. Next day nobody brought the correct solution except Gokhale, and the teacher well pleased with him asked him to sit at the top of the class. Gokhale would not move but was in tears. He explained that the solution was not his, but that he had the assistance of some senior student and therefore could not claim the honour.—Velankar interviewed by SRV.

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Under-age was no bar

Though Gokhale had passed the selection examination for the Matriculation Examination, there was a last minute hitch in sending him up for the examination as he was under-aged. The Headmaster therefore did not include

his name in the list and called Gokhale and explained the situation in him. Gokhale was completely upset and went home dejected. At nightfall he told his aunt that he was going to the Headmaster's house and he may come late or spend the night in the Headmaster's house, as many boys in those days did.

He went to the Headmaster's house and pleaded with him to send him up for the examination as his brother had not the means to educate him for another year and if he was not sent he said he and his family will be in great distress. Just then the Headmaster's wife having overheard the conversation saw the young and child-like face of Gokhale and asked her husband whether he did not feel like helping such a young, attractive, innocent-looking, clever boy. "You have selected the other boy in the fourth house who is well known as a nit-wit". The Headmaster said "You need not recommend Gokhale to me. He is in every way one of our best boys, but he is under-aged. The rule says I cannot send an under-aged boy. I am helpless. The other boy whom you referred to has just got the minimum marks and is not underaged. That is why he is sent". Then the Headmaster addressed Gopal, and said "Gopal you can go home. I shall speak to your uncle. Don't worry. You can certainly appear next year". Then he bolted the door and went to sleep.

At about 5 a.m. the headmaster's wife opened the door and came out to clean the door-steps. To her surprise she found Gokhale still standing near the door. Immediately she recognized him and shouted to her husband and said "Gopal had been standing in the open all night because you have not sent him for the Matriculation Examination. Please come and satisfy the boy and give him an assurance that you would send him for the Matriculation Examination so that he may go home. He is a nice boy. You write to the department that though he is underaged you are sending him for the examination as he can do very well". The Headmaster said, "it may require a physical fitness certificate" Interrupting the Headmaster, Gopal

said, "Sir I have done well in all games in the school and outside and I am better in health than most of the boys who have been sent, as the school records will show". The Headmaster did not till then remember this aspect of Gokhale's life and seeing the indisputable claim of Gokhale to be sent purely on his academic performance and the powerful advocacy of Gokhale's claim by his wife, he sent him for the Matriculation Examination that year.—Velankar interviewed by SRV.

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Proud and abstemious

When Gopal was studying at Kolhapur, the inmates of his eating house were divided into two groups, the members of the first being allowed curds and pickles and chutneys for which they were charged an extra eight annas per month and the second group being satisfied with food sans curds, sans pickles and therefore paying Rs. 4 in all each month. Once young Gopal Rao quite inadvertently asked for curds, but he was rebuked by the cook that he, who was paying only Rs. 4 should ask for curds. At once the proud spirit of Gopal Rao was roused and he got himself enrolled in the first group at once. This step taken on the spur of the moment, soon taxed his mind to find ways and means to meet this additional half-a-rupee. He could not write to his brother for this extra sum nor earn it by himself, but soon hit up on an idea. Members of the first group absenting themselves from any meal were not to be charged for it, and Gokhale managed to go without food on some occasions in order to make good the eight annas.—Shahani

Submits to his elder brother

When both the brothers were studying at Kagal, Gopal Rao always did well in his studies and Govinda Rao not so well. So once the teacher told the uncle of the two brothers that Govinda Rao the elder should pay more attention to his studies. Govinda Rao was accordingly administered a rebuke by his uncle for his slackness

in studies. So at night when Gopal Rao was studying Govinda Rao came up to him and told him that he could not keep late hours like him and study and therefore Gopal Rao too should not also study at night. So saying he put the light out and asked Gopal also to go to sleep. Gopal Rao, like a meek and affectionate brother obeyed his brother and abstained from reading at night when Govinda Rao was in the house. Yet he did well in his studies.—Velankar interviewed by SRV.

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More than a match

It was on board the Crown Prince, some years ago that I found myself in the master's company together with the common friend Mr. Kallenbach. He was accepted as a worthy companion by Gokhale who used to play with him quoit. Mr. Gokhale had just then during his voyage from Cape Town to England picked up that game and he very nearly gave Mr. Kallenbach a beating. I fancy that was a drawn game between them and let me add Mr. Kallenbach so far as I am aware was one of the cleverest players of quoit in South Africa. Just after we had our meals, Gokhale was talking to me with reference to the results of the game. He thought that I never indulged in such sports and that I was against them. He expostulated with me in kind words and said "Do you know why I want to enter into such competitions with Europeans? I certainly want to do at least as much as they can do for the sake of our country. It is said rightly or wrongly that we are inferior people in many matters and so far as I can do it", and this he said in all humility. "I certainly want to show that we are at least their equals if not their superiors"—Gandhiji in his address at the Provincial Conference Bombay 1915.

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Reads by the light of a street lamp

Once a well-to-do friend of Gokhale invited him to a theatrical performance and Gokhale taking it as an in-

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vation agreed. Next day the friend who could very well have borne the expense presented Gokhale with a bill of two annas as Gopal Rao's share for the ticket. Though taken aback, he paid it and made up the deficit by saving on oil by reading in the light of street lamps.—Shahani.

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Rules of the game

The brothers, Govinda Rao and Gopal Rao were playing a village game of running after and catching the opponents within a quadrangular space bounded by some lines within which alone they had the liberty to move about. It so happened that the two brothers were on opposite sides and chance brought Govinda Rao, the elder to be chased by the younger Gopal Rao, the former trying to score a run. When the elder brother found it was no easy work for him to outstrip the younger brother he began to use his authority as senior, to escape, whereupon Gopal Rao firmly but very meekly answered, "Rather ask me not to take any part in this game, for that will be far smaller sacrifice for me than what you ask, for as long as I belong to a party, I must, to the utmost of my powers, uphold its interests, irrespective of any other consideration".—Shahani.

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Serious, earnest and appreciative

He took to games as earnestly as to business. When at play he was intensely earnest so much so that while playing cards or billiards or tennis if the other players did not play the game as seriously as he did, he would get irritated. Once a friend played quite seriously as his partner just to humour him and his joy was unbounded like that of a playful child and said, "Oh, I thank you so much, you played well. The other people purposely tease me, because they know I am annoyed at their slipshod play."—P. K. Telang.

Embodiment of Humility

A characteristic incident occurred when Gokhale was leaving Bankipore. He was a member of the Public Services Commission at the time and as such was entitled to first-class railway compartment to himself. He was not well and crowds and uncongenial company upset him. He liked to be left alone by himself and after the strain of the Congress session he was looking forward to a quiet journey by train. He got his compartment but the rest of the train was crowded with delegates returning to Calcutta. After a little while, Bhupendras Nath Basu, who later became a member of the India Council came up to Gokhale and casually asked him if he could travel in his compartment. Gokhale was little taken aback as Basu was an aggressive talker, but naturally he agreed. A few minutes later Basu again came up to Gokhale and asked him if he would mind if a friend of his also travelled in the same compartment. Gokhale again mildly agreed. A little before the train left, Basu mentioned casually that both he and his friend would find it comfortable to sleep in the lower berth so would Gokhale mind occupying an upper berth so that the two lower berths may be taken by them. Poor Gokhale had to climb up and spend a bad night.—Autobiography Jawaharlal Nehru.

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Protects his political opponent

In front the enormous audience raged like a white sea. Mr. Gokhale leader of the Moderates, stood beside his old extremist-friend and opponent with both arms stretched out to protect him. In another second a wave of men brandishing long sticks rushed over the platform, table, chair, Moderates, and all. But I had time to recognise how that little action revealed the man. "Sweet reasonableness", "Sweetness and light"—these are exactly the qualities that Mr. Gokhale possess, and with them he has courage, rather a rare combination. Other leaders of the Indian Reform movement have greater rhetorical power, more popular ways and perhaps wider influence with the common people; but I know none who gives such a sense of confidence of clear

and definite aims and of a reasonable estimate as to what is possible and what is not.—The New Spirit in India
H. W. Neevinson.

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Knighthood declined

I remember in London when he had just an offer made to him of knighthood, I happened to go to see him. And he said "What shall I do with it? If I accept this honour, shall I not cease to be Gopal Krishna Gokhale whom my friends love and are familiar with". "Sir Gopal Rao Gokhale" he said, would seem to erect a barrier. So, as you know the nominal knighthood went, because he was too knightly, too chivalrous in his soul to accept the title which he thought would act as a barrier for men many of whom were humble in position, but were dear to his noble heart.—Dr. Besant.

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Asserts his self-respect

I happened to be present when the Public Services Commission visited Madras and were invited by the ever-hospitable Natesan to his house. I was talking to Mr. Madge, I.C.S., who was then a Member of the Viceroy's Council on a bill in which he was much interested. At that moment Mr. Gokhale came up to us. Mr. Madge said to Gokhale a little abruptly, "Oh, Mr. Gokhale I was just thinking that the best of you do not come among us? Why do you not join us and work with us?" There was a moment's silence and then Mr. Gokhale drew himself up to his full height and said, "We will never come among you Mr. Madge until you are prepared to treat us as your equals."—Dr. Besant.

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Gokhale snubs an English merchant

"I started for England for the third time from Bombay on May 31st, 1912. By a curious coincidence Gokhale happened to be my fellow passenger and I immensely enjoyed and profited by his company. One incident comes vividly to my mind. An English merchant who had busi-

ness relations in the East was returning and was among the passengers. One morning at the breakfast table the conversation turned upon the amount spent by the Indian Government on education. He in a supercilious manner exclaimed, "What, are we not spending too much on Education?" Gokhale at once flared up and said, "Sir, What do you mean by 'we.' Am I to understand that England raises a sum by subscription and spends it as charity for Education in India". Gokhale was always known to be of imperturbable temper and this was the only occasion I saw him lose control of it. The effect at the breakfast table was almost magical. Everyone kept quiet—Sir P. C. Ray.

Dutiful gateman

Gokhale entered the Deccan Education Society as life member. Ranade was then, as even now, the Father and Founder of National movements. In 1885 the Deccan Education Society was to enter a new phase of activity. The Bombay Governor was to inaugurate the ceremony. It was a unique function for the residents of Poona. The number of invitees was limited with numbered cards. Mr. Gokhale was asked to receive the guests at the door. The honourable Mr. Ranade (as he then was) could not show his card, and Gokhale would not allow him to enter as the latter had not seen the former before. It created a sort of uneasiness in the hall, and the senior member of the Society intervened and took Ranade in the hall. The ceremony passed off then smoothly but it touched the delicate heart of young Gokhale. Six months or so passed and he was, all of a sudden sent for by Mr. Ranade. All quietly Ranade asked Mr. Gokhale to take charge of the Secretariatship of the Sarvajana Sabha of Poona. Mr. Gokhale first eased his heart by expressing his regret for the last mentioned incident. Ranade with a smile said that, however, revealed you to me as the fittest person for the work now being entrusted to you. This, in short, was the beginning of the relations between his great Guru and his disinterested disciple which commenced in 1886 and lasted to the last.—Patwardhan interviewed by SRV,

Apology Incident

In 1897, Poona city had the first visitation of bubonic plague. The Military which was entrusted with the task of combating it was charged with several misdemeanors, of heinous kind. These were brought to the notice of Gokhale who was then in England to give evidence before the Welby Commission. Gokhale published the news in England in some of the leading papers, and the Government of Britain wired to the Bombay Governor for an explanation. The Governor of Bombay cabled back saying that the charges made by Gokhale were false, and wanted Gokhale to substantiate them.

When this news was published in India those from Poona who had complained to Gokhale wrote to Gokhale not to reveal their names.

On reaching Poona Gokhale consulted his Guru Ranade. As those who wrote to Gokhale were not coming forward to substantiate their allegations, Ranade advised Gokhale to tender an unconditional apology which he did.—D. P. Interviewed by SRV 1932.

Protects Tilak

At the Surat Congress held in 1907, there was a split between the Extremists and the progressives. Tilak the extremist leader came and stood on the platform with folded arms refusing to move till he was heard. When the President Dr. Rash Behari Ghose asked him to wait till the formal business was over, Tilak refused to obey. The moment was tense and the followers of both the parties were preparing for the affray. Understanding the delicate situation forced on the house by Tilak, Gokhale jumped and stood in front of Tilak, his political opponent and stretched out both his arms to protect Tilak. Gokhale was just in time, for immediately sticks, tables and chairs were thrown and men brandishing their sticks got up the platform to attack their opponents. But for Gokhale's timely action Tilak would have been injured in the melee.

Gokhale and the Prince of Wales's Visit, 1906

The Prince of Wales (later King George V) was visiting India in 1906, and there was considerable divergence of opinion in the Congress at that time regarding the question of extending him a welcome. Tilak said that he would oppose the proposal in the open session of the Congress of 1905, of which Gokhale was the President. Gokhale however was anxious to get the resolution passed without any dissent. For this he pleaded with Tilak and Lajpat Rai to stay away from the open session of the Congress till the passing of the resolution. When the matter was being discussed in the Reception Committee room, Gokhale felt that Tilak would not gudge from his position. Gokhale while pleading with Tilak took off his pugree and placed it at Tilak's feet. Tilak was completely disarmed. Tilak nobly responded by agreeing not to attend the opening session when the proposal to offer a welcome to the Prince or Wales would be discussed.

Gokhale's aversion for Ghee.

Gokhale had an aversion for Ghee because once he had to take some bitter Ayurvedic medicine mixed with ghee. Since then he was allergic to ghee and avoided taking it, but took butter instead. If by inadvertance ghee was served in his plate it had to be removed and a fresh plate without ghee had to be brought in.—D.P. 1932.

Gokhale and Charni Road incident. Karmarkar played a trick

Gokhale would neither remember the roads in Bombay, while walking nor its topography. When Gokhale and his classmate Karmarkar went to Bombay to sit for the first B.A. Examination, they were put up at the Elphinstone Hostel. Karmarkar and his friends wanted to play jokes with Gokhale and took him with them along unfamiliar roads. On their way, back both Gokhale and Karmarkar were walking abreast talking, and

the impish Karmarkar purposely lagged behind, and disappeared into a bylane. But Gokhale, thinking that Karmarkar was with him went on talking and walking. The road he was taking was not the correct one, but Gokhale did not know it. When Gokhale turned to his side and did not find Karmarkar, he turned back and ran shouting 'Karmarkar, where are you, Why have you left me like this?' and came to the place where Karmarkar and his friends were standing and watching the fun. They all laughed over the incident and went back to the Hostel. Gokhale the loveable companion did not get angry but was as affectionate and friendly as ever.—Karmarkar, Interviewed 1932.

His burning patriotism

"The very fierceness of his patriotism prevented him from becoming popular as popularity is often understood or rather misunderstood. He could not abide people with pompous talk and feeble nerve; and insincerity provoked him to open condemnation. Both morally and intellectually he was too quick and too impatient to suffer knaves or fools gladly. I remember on an occasion in the Library of the National Liberal Club, he snubbed a member of the Indian Civil Service who gave us the benefit of his criticism of certain proposals which Gokhale was advocating. He bluntly asked him whether he had done any constructive work in the cause of India himself which alone can entitle him to appear or to be heard as a critic".—C. R. Reddy, Gokhale appreciation and Reminiscences.

Self restraint needed

What impressed him most in European life was not its freedom but its self imposed restraints. "Look", he once said, "if you have a hundred Europeans at a social gathering there is not the least noise; they talk in, low whispers, their movements are characterised by dignity and repose, but a similar number of Indians." and he never finished the sentence.

"Do you think" he once asked me, "that the social and political theory of England would have been possible if the people were not under a strict regime of self imposed restraints?" To him beauty and order were almost convertible terms. There could be no beauty unless there was order and all order was beautiful. I do not know if this is an aesthetic perversion, but I have always attributed his strong feeling for order to his training as a mathematician.—C. R. Reddy.

Gokhale and Elementary education

When Gokhale introduced his compulsory education Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council it was opposed by the industrial magnates and business interests. Their fear was that widespread education would lead to labour Unions, strikes and all those labour developments which are the nightmare of the capitalists.

At Calcutta Gokhale and Sir Ratan had a conversation on the subject, when Gokhale, as Sir Ratan Tata himself told me, with a laugh, used violent language, left him, and within half an hour sent a nice note of apology and made it all up. Sir Ratan said, "I never could get angry with Gokhale because he was so true, so good and so sane. The curse of a saint is better than the blessings of a hypocrite" and they remained firm friends to the end.—C. R. Reddy.

One of Gokhale's phrase has become immortal in English literature

In a letter to Mrs Naidu who was then in feeble health he asked, "Why should the song bird have a broken wing?", And "BROKEN WING" became the title of the most moving of the volumes of the gifted poetess.—C. R. Reddy.

Gokhale and social life on board the steamer

While sailing from Southampton to Cape town in 1912, Gokhale entered a tournament of games and amuse-

ments. One of the items was to carry some thing about one indicative of the name of some well-known book in English literature. Gokhale told me that he did not know what to carry about which would indicate in a clever enough manner any of the well known books. At the last moment just as he was dressing he found the programme of the tournament on the table. He pinned that to the breast of his coat and went on deck. And when the master of revels asked him for the solution of the puzzle, which nobody could solve, he took out the programmed and said, "The history of our Times" by Justin McCarthy." And with boyish glee he told me that he won the prize—the prize for English literature.—C. R. Reddy.

I remember his telling me once that feeling without power was hysterics, and power without feeling was brutishness. A nation should be neither hysterical nor brutal; it should be human; it should strive for what it can to accomplish and it must accomplish, with due regard to the higher laws of our being all that it is capable of.

—C. R. Reddy

Incidents of his South African tour, 1912

Gokhale applied for a first class berth in one of the steamers going to Cape Town. He was informed by the Company that he being an Indian could not be given single berth because no Europeans would care to occupy the other berths in the cabin, as the Europeans had a rooted objection to bunk with Indians, especially in the South African boats. To which Gokhale replied that he was not prepared to pay for more than one berth and if no Englishman would care to share the Cabin with him he was quite resigned to monopolising the whole cabin, but would on no account pay for the unoccupied berths and added that if the Company would not issue a ticket on those terms he would appeal to the Chairman, who I believe was Lord Sutherland. As there was fear of this personal incident developing into a political, wiser coun-

sels prevailed and he was given a ticket and I believe the whole cabin.—C. R. Reddy.

Secretary of State's fear

Lord Crew the then-Secretary of State for India felt perturbed by the possibility of similar or worse incidents occurring during Gokhale's tour in South Africa, and like the generous man and able diplomat that he was, he wanted to prepare the ground for the full social recognition of Gokhale by the aristocracy, if it could be called an aristocracy, of South Africa. So he arranged a dinner, with Gokhale as one of the guests at which no less a person than His gracious Majesty, the king had condescended to be present.—C. R. Reddy.

Gokhale sensitive on Board the ship

Gokhale was very sensitive indeed on the subject of courtesies and proper treatment. Fearing that at the Dinner Table he might be relegated to some nook or corner, which he could not with dignity occupy, he stayed away in his cabin determined that if no body approached him and assigned a proper place he would remain there and dine by himself. A few minutes before dinner the steward himself called with the compliments of the Captain and informed him that the Captain requested the honour of his company at the Officers' table at which Gokhale was very pleased.—C. R. Reddy.