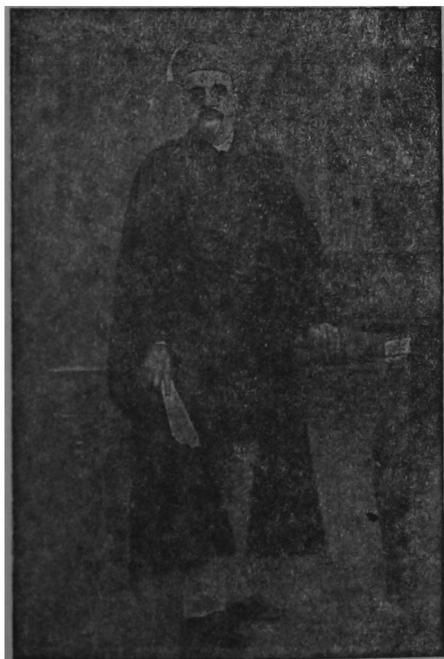


# GOKHALEANA

No. 12

May 9, 1975

---



**Gokhale's 108th Birthday  
9th May 1975**

---

*Edited by*

**S. R. VENKATARAMAN,  
Servants of India Society, Madras-600014**

## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

This issue of Gokhaleana contains: (1) A poem on Gokhale; (2) Reminiscences of Mr. Gokhale, the Man and his mission; (3) A letter written to the late Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and lastly a poem entitled, *In Gokhale's Garden*, all written by Shrimathi Sarojini Naidu, one of our great lyric poets, in English and an ardent disciple of both the late Gopala Krishna Gokhale and Gandhiji.

Items one and two were published, in the *Indian Social Reformer* and the *Bombay Chronicle* soon after Gokhale's death, on 19-2-1915; item No. 3 is a letter to the late Rt. Hon. Srinivasa Sastri by Sarojini Naidu on 10-6-1915 and the poem *In Gokhale's Garden* is from the collection of Shrimathi Sarojini Naidu's poems, entitled *The Feather of the Dawn*.

Gokhale too was a poet; in replying to Shrimathi Sarojini's letter informing him of her illness, Gokhale wrote, "Why should a song bird like you have a *Broken Wing*?" This phrase '*the Broken Wing*' has become famous in Anglo Indian literature as Mrs. Sarojini had published some of her poems under the title, *The Broken Wing*.

8, West Cott Road,  
Madras-600014,  
9th May 1975.

S. R. VENKATARAMAN,  
*Secretary,*  
Servants of India Society.

## PART I

“Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the great saint and soldier of our national righteousness. His life was a sacrament, and his death was a sacrifice in the cause of Indian unity.”

—SAROJINI NAIDU

**Heroic heart ! lost hope of all our days !  
Need's thou the homage of our love or praise ?  
Lo ! 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 save our stricken land ;  
And in a daily worship taught by thee  
Upbuild the Temple of her Unity.**

19—2—1915

—SAROJINI NAIDU

## REMINISCENCES OF MR. GOKHALE— THE MEN AND HIS MISSION

BY

SHRIMATI SAROJINI NAIDU

My personal association with Mr. Gokhale, commenced, as it ended, with a written message. It had fallen to me to propose the resolution on the education of women at the Calcutta Sessions of the All India Social Conference of 1906; and something in my speech moved him sufficiently to pass me these hurried and cordial sentences which, unworthy as I know myself of such generous appreciation, I venture to transcribe, since they struck the keynote of all our future intercourse. "May I take the liberty," he wrote, "to offer you my most respectful and enthusiastic congratulations? Your speech was more than an intellectual treat of the highest order.....We all felt for the moment to be lifted to a higher plane."

An acquaintance began on such a happy note of sympathy, grew and ripened at the last into a close and lovely comradeship which I counted among the crowning honours of my life. And though it was not without its poignant moments of brief and bitter estrangement, our friendship was always radiant, both with the joy of spiritual refreshment, and the quickening challenge of intellectual discussion and dissent. Above all, there was the ever deepening bond of our common love for the Motherland; and, for as hert space, there was alone the added tie of a tender, dependence, infinitely touching and child like, on such comfort and companionship as I, with my own broken health, could render him through long weeks of suffering and distress in a foreign land.

Between 1907 and 1911, it was my good fortune to meet him several times, chiefly during my flying visits to Bombay, but also on different occasions, in Madras, Poona and Delhi. After each meeting, I would always carry away the memory of some fervent and stirring word of exhortation to yield my life to the service of India. And, even in the midst of the crowded activities of those epoch-making years, he found leisure to send me, now and then, a warm message of approval, of encouragement, when any poem or speech or action of mine chanced to please him or the frequent rumours of my failing health caused him anxiety or alarm.

But it was not till the beginning of 1912, when I spent a few weeks in Calcutta with my father, that any real intimacy was established between us. "Hitherto I have always caught you on the wing," he said, "now I will cage you long enough to grasp your true spirit." It was in the course of the long and delightful conversations of this period that I began to comprehend the intrinsic and versatile greatness of the man, and to marvel by what austere and fruitful process he was able to reconcile and assimilate the complex and often conflicting qualities of his essentially dual personality into so supreme an achievement of single-hearted patriotism. It was to me a valuable lesson in human psychology to study the secret of this rich and paradoxical nature. There was the outer man as the world knew and esteemed him, with his precise and brilliant and subtle intellect, his unrivalled gifts of political analysis and synthesis, this flawless and relentless mastery and use of the consummate logic of co-ordinated facts and figures, his courteous but inexorable candour in opposition, his patient dignity and courage in honourable compromise, the breadth and restraint, the vigor and

veracity of his far-reaching statesmanship; the lofty simplicities and sacrifices of his daily life. And breaking through the veils of his many self-repressions, was the inner man that revealed himself to me, in all his intense, impassioned hunger for human kinship and affection, in all the tumult and longing, the agony of doubt and ecstasy of faith of the born idealist, perpetually seeking some unchanging reality in a world full of shifting disillusion and despair. In him, I felt that both the practical, strenuous worker and the mystic dreamer of dreams were harmonised by the age long discipline of his Brahminical ancestry which centuries before had evolved the spirit of the Bhagavat Gita and defined true Yoga as Wisdom in Action. But even he could not escape the limitation of his inheritance. Wide and just as were his recognitions of all human claims to equality, he had nevertheless hidden away, perhaps unsuspected, something of that conservative pride of his Brahminical descent which instinctively resented the least question of its ancient monopoly of power. One little instance of this weakness if I may use the world, occurs to me. At the All India Conference which was held in Calcutta at the end of 1911, in the course of an address on the so-called Depressed Classes, I happened to have remarked that the denial of their equal human rights and opportunities of life was largely due to the tyranny of arrogant Brahmins in the past. My father who was also present at the meeting, noted and ironically rallied me on the phrase which appealed to both his sense of humour and equity. But, to my surprise, I found that Mr. Gokhale regarded the word 'arrogant' almost as a personal affront! It was no doubt a brave and beautiful speech," he said in a tone of reproach, "but you sometimes use harsh, bold phrases." Soon after, discussing

an allied topic, he burst out saying, "You in spite of yourself you are typically Hindu in spirit. You begin with a ripple and end in eternity." "But, I answered, a little nettled," "when have I ever disclaimed my heritage?" Another conversation of these weeks stands out with special significance in the light of coming events. One morning, a little despondent and sick at heart about national affairs in general, he suddenly asked me "What is your outlook for India?" "One of hope," I replied. "What is your vision of the immediate future?" "The Hindu Muslim Unity in less than five years," I told him with joyous conviction. "Child," he said, with a note of yearning sadness in his voice "You are a poet, but you hope too much. It will not come in your life-time or in mine. But keep your faith and work if you can." In March of the following year I met him for a few minutes only at a large party in Bombay given by Sir Pherozeshah Metha for the members of the Royal Commission. I had recently brought out a new book of verses which just then happily for me was attracting some attention and applause. And Mr. Gokhale's short conversation with me was very characteristic of his attitude of distrust towards such things. "Does the flame still burn brightly?" he questioned. "Brighter than ever," I answered. But he shook his head doubtfully and a little sternly. "I wonder," he thundered, "I wonder how the storm of such long duration will withstand excessive adulation and success.

A week later, it was my unique privilege to attend and address the new historic sessions of the Muslim League which met in Lucknow on the 22nd March 1922 to adopt a new constitution which sounded the keynote of loyal co-operation with the sister community in all matters of

national welfare and progress. The unanimous acclamation with which it was carried by both the older and younger schools of Mussalman politicians marked a new era and inaugurated a new standard in the history of modern Indian affairs. From Lucknow I travelled, almost without a break direct to Poona, where I was due on the 25th and on the morning of the 26th, I walked across with the Hon. Mr. Paranjoye from Fergusson College to the Servants of India Society. I found the world-famous leader of the Indian National Congress weak and suffering from a relapse of his old illness, but busy scanning the journals that were full of comments and criticisms of the Muslim League and its new ideals. "Ah," he cried with outstretched hands when he saw me, "have you come to tell me that your vision was true?"...and he began to question me over and over again with a breathless eagerness that seemed almost impatient of my words about the real underlying spirit of the Conference. His weary and pain-worn face lighted up with pleasure when I assured him that, so far at least as the younger men were concerned, it was not an instinct of mere political expediency but one of genuine conviction and a growing consciousness of wider and graver national responsibility that had promoted them to stretch out so frankly and generously, the hand of good fellowship to the Hindus, and I hoped that the coming Congress would respond to it with equal, if not even greater, cordiality. "So far as it lies in my power," he answered, "it shall be done." After an hour or so I found him exhausted with the excitement of the happy news I had brought him from so far! but he insisted on my returning to complete my visit to him that afternoon. When I went back to the Servants of India Society in the evening, I found a strangely transformed Mr. Gokhale,



brisk and smiling, a little pale, but without any trace of the mornings languor and depression, "What," I almost screamed as he was preparing to lead the way upstairs, "surely you cannot mean to mount all those steps, you are too ill." He laughed, "You have put new hope into me," he said, "I feel strong enough to face life and work again." Presently, his sister and two charming daughters joined us for half an hour on the broad terrace with its peaceful view over sunset hills and valleys and we talked of pleasant and passing things. This was my first and only glimpse and realization of the personal domestic side of this lonely and impersonal worker. After their departure we sat quietly in the gathering twilight till his golden voice, stirred by some deep emotion, broke the silence with golden words of counsel and admonition, so grand, so solemn and so inspiring, that they have never ceased to thrill me. He spoke of the unequalled happiness and privilege of serve for India. "Stand here with me," he said, "with the stars and hills for witness and in their presence consecrate your life and your talent, your song and your speech, your thought and your dream to the motherland. O poet, see visions from the hilltops and spread abroad the message of hope to the toilers in the valleys." As I took my leave of him, he said again to the humble messenger of happy tidings; "You have given me new hope, new faith, new courage. To-night I shall rest. I shall sleep with a heart at peace."

Two months later, early in June after an absence of fifteen years, I found myself in London once more and among the many friends who greeted me on my arrival was the familiar figure of Mr. Gokhale wholly in unfamiliar European garments and yes-actually an English top hat. I stared at him for a moment. "Where, I asked him,

“is your rebellious turban.” But I soon got accustomed to this new phase of my old friend, to a social Gokhale who attended parties and frequented theatres, played bridge and entertained ladies at dinner on the terrace of the National Liberal Club a far cry from the terrace of the Servants of India Society.

In spite of his uncertain health, he was very busy throughout the summer with his work on the Royal Commission and his anxious pre-occupations with Indian affairs in South Africa, then threatening an acute crisis. But he would often come to see me where I was staying at the house of Sir Krishna Gupta. Mr. Gokhale had a great fancy for cherries, and I always took care to provide a liberal supply whenever he was expected. “Every man has his price,” I would tease him, “and yours is cherries.” One day, at the end of July, sitting over a dish of ripe red cherries, I broached the subject of a delicate mission which I had undertaken on behalf of the London Indian Association, a new student organization that had only a few weeks previously been founded by Mr. M. A. Jinnah with the active and eager support of Indian students in London. Their earnest endeavour was to provide a permanent centre to focus, scattered student life in London and to build up such staunch tradition of cooperation and fellowship that this young association might eventually grow into a perfect miniature and model of the federated India of the future, the India of their dreams; and it was their ardent desire to start on their new mission of service with a word of sympathy and blessing from this incomparable friend and servant of India. At first a firm refusal of my request backed by the strict prohibition of his doctors of all undue strain and fatigue somewhat daunted me. But I had a little rashly more or less pledged my

word that he would speak, and I redoubled my persuasions. "You not only defy all laws of health yourself," he grumbled, "but incite me also to disobedience and revolt." "Besides," and his eyes flashed for a moment, "what right had you to pledge your word for me?" "The right," I told him, "to demand from you at all costs a message of hope for the young generation" A few days later, on the 2nd August, he delivered a magnificent inaugural address at Caxton Hall in the presence of a large and enthusiastic audience of students, and set before them those sublime lessons of patriotism and self-sacrifice which he alone so signally, among the men of his generation, was competent to teach with authority and grace.

Shortly afterwards he left for India to wage his brave and glorious battle in the cause of his suffering compatriots in South Africa. And though now his health was finally ruined beyond all chance of recovery, it was with the rapture of victorious martyrdom that he wrote from his sick-bed about the end of December, to tell me how prompt and splendid had been the response of a truly United India to the call of her gallant heroes fighting for right and justice in a far-off land.

On his return to England in the spring of 1914, his condition was so precarious as to cause his friends and physicians the gravest concern; and at first he was confined entirely to bed. But with his overgracious kindness towards me, he paid me a visit on the very day he was permitted to leave his room, as I was then too ill to go and see him. "Why should a song-bird like you have a broken wing," he murmured a little sadly; and presently told me that he had just received his own death-warrant at the hands of his doctors. "With the utmost care," he said, "they think, I might perhaps live for three years

longer." But in his calm and thoughtful manner there was no sign of selfish rebellion or fear, only an infinite regret for his unfinished service to India.

But soon, I was well enough to accompany him on the short motor drives that were his sole form of recreation; and on mild days, as we sat in the soft sunshine under the budding trees of Kensington Gardens he would talk to me with that sure instinct of his for choice and graphic phrases that lent his conversation so much distinction and charm. "Give me a corner of your brain that I can call my own," he would say. And in that special corner that was his I treasure many memorable sayings. I learnt to wonder not merely at the range and variety of his culture but at his fastidious preferences for what Charles Lamb has called the delicacies of fine literature. He had also an almost romantic curiosity towards the larger aspects of life and death and destiny, and a quick apprehension of the mysterious forces that govern the main springs of human feeling and experience. One day, a little wistfully he said, "Do you know, I feel that an abiding sadness underlies all that unfailing brightness of yours. Is it because you have come so near death that its shadows still cling to you?" "No," I answered, "I have come so near life that its fires have burnt me." But like a humming bird, his heart would always return with swift and certain flight to the one immutable passion of life, his love for that India, which to him was mistress and mother, goddess and child in one. He would speak of the struggles and disappointments of his early days, the triumphs and failures, the rewards and renunciations of his later years, his vision of India and her ultimate goal, her appointed place and purpose in the wider counsels and responsibilities of the Empire. He spoke too of his work and his colleagues,

Royal Commission, the Viceregal Council and the National Congress; and though to the end he remained a better judge of human situation rather than of individuals, I was struck with the essential fairness of his estimates which seemed in one luminous phrase to reveal the true measure of a man. Of one, he said, "He can mould heroes out of common clay," of another that "He has fine sincerity a little marred by hasty judgment," of yet another "He has true stuff in him and that freedom from all sectarian prejudice which will make him the best ambassador of the Hindu-Muslim Unity." Of a fourth, "He has made those sacrifices which entitle him to be heard."

Of the many pressing matters that occupied his mind at that time, there were four which to him were of absorbing interest. His scheme for compulsory education which, he felt, was the only solid basis on which to found any lasting national progress; the Hindu-Muslim question which, he said, could be most effectively solved if the leaders of the sister communities would deal in a spirit of perfect unison with certain fundamental problems of equal and urgent importance to both; the high privilege and heavy responsibility of the younger generation whose function it was to grapple with more immense and vital issues than his generation had been called upon to face; and of course, the future of the Servants of India Society, which was the actual embodiment of all his dreams and devotion for India.

These open-air conversations, however came to a speedy end. He suddenly grew worse and was forbidden to leave his room or to receive visitors. But I was fortunate enough to be allowed to see him almost daily for a few hours till his departure to Vichy. In his whimsical way he would call me the best of all his prescriptions. To

my usual query on crossing the threshold of his sick-room "Well; am I to be a stimulant or a sedative today?" his invariable reply was "Both." And this one word most adequately summed up the need of his sinking heart and overburdened brain through these anxious and critical weeks.

The interval between his first and second visits to Vichy he spent in a quiet little cottage at Twickenham as the guest and neighbour of Mr. and Mrs. Ratan Tata, to whom the nation already owe so many debts of gratitude, and the monotony of the long hours of his temporary and interrupted convalescence was often brightened by the presence of friends whose visits to him were really pilgrimages, and sustained by the devoted attendance of Dr. Jivraj Mehta who has since won such proud academic honours, and of whom Mr. Gokhale more than once said: "He will go far and be a leader of man."

From Vichy he wrote, "Here, in this intense mental solitude, I have come upon the bedrock truths of life and must learn to adjust myself to their demands." The outbreak of war in August brought him back to England a little prematurely. But though his health had obviously improved, and he was better able to stand the strain of his arduous work on the Royal Commission, he seemed oppressed with a sharp and sudden sense of exile in the midst of an alien civilization and people. He was haunted by a deep nostalgia which he himself could not explain, not merely for the wonted physical scenes and surroundings but for the spiritual texts and tongues of his ancestral land. His conversation during these days was steeped in allusion to the old Sanskrit writers whose mighty music was in his very blood.

The last occasion on which I saw him was on the 8th October, two days before I sailed for India. Something, may be, of the autumnal sadness of fallen leaves and growing mists had passed into his mood, or, may be, he felt the foreshadowing of the wings of Death. But as he bade me farewell, he said, "I do not think we shall meet again. If you live, remember your life is dedicated to the service of the country. My work is done."

Early in December, shortly after his arrival from Europe, he wrote to complain of the "Scurvy trick" fate had played him in a renewal of his old trouble; but succeeding letters reported returning strength and ability to work again. In the last letter written the day before his fatal illness, he spoke of his health being now stationary and of his coming visit to Delhi. But it was otherwise ordained. As the poet says, "True as the peach to its ripening taste is destiny to her hour." His predestined hour had already struck. On the 19th February, the self-same stars that he had invoked one year ago to witness the consecration of a life to the service of India kept vigil over the passing of this great saint and soldier of national righteousness. And of him surely, in another age and in another land were the prophetic words uttered "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

## PART II

### THE CHILDREN'S TRIBUTE TO GOKHALE

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu addressed the following letter to the Hon. Mr. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, President of the Servants of India Society, under date 10th June 1915, on the occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Society :—

On this proud and melancholy occasion of the tenth anniversary of your Society, you will doubtless be overwhelmed with cordial messages of congratulation from all parts of India, and a sad renewal of tributes and testimonies to the memory of your beloved founder and first President.

To this long garland of greetings will you permit me to add, as a pendant of fresh blown buds, the story of the Childrens tribute to the great Gokhale ?

Sometimes I think that the supremest service of this incomparable servant of India to his country, lies in the everlasting inspiration of his death, more even than in the actual achievement of his life-time for it has already proved a miraculous divining-rod over the hidden spirings of national feeling everywhere ; and it has made articulate, in a sudden realisation of indivisible unity of Indian life and sentiment, even in a conservative and self-centred city like Hyderabad with its haughty traditions of isolation from all public affairs outside its own special horizon of interests. Memorable in our public record was the remarkable gathering of men of all communities and classes that for the first time in their experience met together to voice as one man their sense of real loss and grief at India's irreparable loss ; unique and epoch making in our social history ; was the even more remarkable



gathering of women of all creeds, castes, and ranks and fortunes, who assembled to give expression in six different languages to their sorrow, and the Mussalman ladies vied with the Hindu ladies in the eloquence and sincerity of their mourning. But to me, touching, significant and symbolic beyond all other tokens of reverence and regret has been the tribute of the children of Hyderabad for one whose heart was like a child's and whose life so abundantly fulfilled all their desire and capacity for hero-worship. There is an association here of young Hindu and Mussalman boys and children who act Indian and English dramas for their own amusement, but they are not so absorbed in their own pleasures that they do not hear and answer the call of public duty.

Eighteen months ago when Mr. Gokhale's golden voice rang out like a trumpet-call for help on behalf of the suffering Indians in South Africa, and men gave their wealth and women their jewels for the cause, these young patriots, having nothing else, coined their love and talent into gold and have a goodly contribution in response to their hero's call for aid. Now he is dead; but in their young hearts he lives enshrined. A few weeks ago they came to me and said, "we wish to make our contribution to your Gokhale Memorial Fund. We will stage a play." Last night in the presence of a large and representative audience of all communities, including a striking number of Purdanashin ladies, the association of boys and children gave a brilliant performance in aid of the "Gokhale Memorial Fund." It was a charming play, a musical fantasy from the Arabian Nights, composed by a member of the association my seventeen year old brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, of whom Ms. Gokhale used to say, when he was only fourteen, "this child's genius

gives me electric thrill" a play written by a boy and acted by boys and children. The staging was beautiful, and every thing was as perfect as they could render it, not only for the honour of art, but for the honour of the cause for which they were giving their time and talent the honour of Gokhale's memory.

They began with a specially composed invocation to the Spirit of Gokhale also the work of my brother, in which Hindu and Muhammadan boys too part; then followed a poem in Urdu, written for the occasion, by a young Muhammadan poet. The performers realised more than Rs. 600 last night to offer as their share towards the upraising of a local memorial in their hero's honour.

And so the generations are linked together by the continuity of ideals and a common love inspired by a great and selfless spirit. I think that spirit must have rejoiced to see how spontaneously and whole-heartedly the younger section of India unconsciously interpreted and fulfilled the sublime lesson he always taught that no gift is more fine or fruitful than personal service leavened by personal love; and he who laid down his life in the cause of Indian unity must surely have given thanks to God that last night, inspired by a common love and a common service, Hindu and Mussalman boys, the young citizens of to-morrow, were animated by one vision, spoke with one voice and were impelled by one inseperable heart of service and devotion.

Pardon me for taking up so much of your time. But you, who are the inheritors of Gokhale's mission of service, ought surely to know wherever the good seed has fallen, that time will reap and destiny knead into bread for the feeding of the hungry spirits in this great country of ours. To-morrow and the hope of to-morrow is always

with the young, and so you too like me will know how to appraise the obvious value, and even more the deep underlying significance of the children's tribute to the great Gokhale.

---

PART III

**IN GOKHALE'S GARDEN**

**With crystal rods the necromantic rain  
Touches dead loveliness to life again,  
Revives on withered meads and barren rocks  
Pastures and gleaming pools for wandering flocks,  
And sows wet fields with red and ivory grain.**

**In your sweet garden where I walked with you,  
The rain has wrought its wizardry anew  
With silver jasmine, golden champak stars,  
Small coral-stemmed, pearl-petelled harsingars  
Bakul and flowering neem of lilac hue.**

**Steadfast, serene, dauntless, supremely wise,  
In earth's renascent bloom with prescient eyes  
You sought hope's symbol and you strove to teach  
My heart with patient, high prophetic speech  
The parable of Beauty's brave emprise.**

**The fragile forms of beauty perish, still  
Endures her proud, imperishable will.**

—SAROJINI NAIDU

*Grom 'The feather of the Dawn.'*

## NOTES

**Sarojini Naidu** (1879-1949): Poet and politician, President of the Kanpur session of the Indian National Congress (1925, Governor of Uttar Pradesh (1947-49)

**Gokhale, Gopal Krishna** (1866-1915): the most outstanding leader before Gandhiji starting life as a teacher he became professor of the Fergusson College, Poona was responsible for its development and growth; joined the Congress, in 1888 and continued to be a congressman till his death; was President of the Indian National Congress held in Banares in 1905; was a member of the Bombay Legislative Council and the Imperial Legislative Council for an interrupted period of about two decades; advocated free and compulsory elementary education for the Indian masses, pleaded for the reduction in the army expenditure abolition of salt tax, attained a leading position in Indian public life by his careful study of public questions, political educational and economic founded the Servants of India Society; died on the 19th February 1915.

**Sastri The Right Hon. V. S. Srinivasa** (1869-1946); Headmaster, The Hindu High School, Triplicane, Madras (1899 to 1907). Joined the Servants of India Society (1907) President of the Servants of India Society, (1915); one of the Founders of the Liberal party in India 1918; and its most outstanding leader; member of the first and second Round Table Conference held in London in 1929 and 1932; during his tour of the Dominions 1922 where Indians are settled and as he worked hard to improve the condition of overseas Indian Agent; General of the Government of India to South Africa (1928-29) a renowned scholar in Sanskrit, and English and as the silver tongued orator of the English speaking world; his lectures on the Ramayana in English are permanent contributions to Indian heritage. He was the Vice-Chancellor of the Annamali University (1938-43).



**G. K. GOKHALE in England in 1897.**