

# Gopal Krishna Gokhale

## 107th Birthday Address

*by*

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# **GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE**

## **A SERVANT OF INDIA**

**Dr. S. P. Aiyar**

*The following is the text of an address delivered by Dr. S. P. Aiyar of Bombay University before a public meeting organised by the Servants of India Society in the Gokhale Hall, Poona on the occasion of the 107th birthday celebration of Gopal Krishna Gokhale on Wednesday, the 9th May 1973:*

We are meeting here today on consecrated ground. Gopal Krishna Gokhale made this his home and the centre of his life's mission. Close by are institutions which breathe the spirit of his work. I am, therefore, deeply conscious of the responsibility which you have asked me to bear on this annual function. But you have done me an honour and I am most grateful to you.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale entered my awareness at an early age. I must have been about eight years old when the large volume of his speeches in my father's well-kept library at Poona caught my fancy, and that, for a curious reason. It contained a picture of Gokhale lying in state; I would look at it unwatched and close the book through some inexplicable fear of the unknown. This was also the time when an epidemic raged in the city and one could hear the dirge of funeral processions. But many years passed before I had an opportunity to return to this volume. This time, with reverence and admiration for the illustrious Servant of India. The dead Gokhale of the imagination of my childhood had now joined the Immortals.

The Collected Speeches constitute the quintessence of Indian liberalism. They reflect his profound political wisdom and represent, as J. S. Hoyland has observed, "statesmanship in action." To this day we can see in the sustained performance of his budget speeches not merely his sure grasp of economic and political problems but also his ardent patriotism, a moving concern for the peasantry, his sleepless anxiety to be always fair even to those whom he was criticising and his unpretentious role in educating both the rulers and the ruled.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale's life was a saga of sacrifice for his country and her people. Neither considerations of health nor personal misfortunes deterred him in the service of India. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "whatever he did, enjoyed, sacrificed; whatever charity he practised; whatever austerities he underwent; all this he surrendered at the feet of Mother India." Within a brief span of forty-eight years were filled many notable achievements. The evidence which he presented when he was barely thirty-two, to the Welby Commission, set up in 1896 to investigate the public expenditure of India, established his instant reputation as the foremost authority of his time on the economic problems of his day. At the end of the cross-examination, Sir William Wedderburn went up to Gokhale and said: "You have done most splendidly. Your evidence will be much the best on our side. Let me congratulate you on the signal service which you have rendered to your country. *Our minority report will be based practically on your evidence.*" (Italics mine) Three years later he was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council, and in 1902 to the Imperial Legislative Council where he delivered the famous speeches to which I have referred. It is with regard to his work in the council that his biographer Hoyland observed: "Of those who came into direct contact with Gokhale in the work of the Legislature, the lesser men believed and trembled; the big men—men of the stamp of Morley, Minto and Hardinge accepted with gladness the fact that here was an Indian leader fit to be ranked by the side of the great constructive statesmen of the world, with a definite programme in view for his country's future, and with concise and concrete policies in mind whereby he might reach his objective." Even Lord Curzon whom Gokhale had criticised in no uncertain terms has left us his exalted opinion of this great parliamentarian: "I have never met a man of any nationality more gifted with parliamentary capacities. Mr. Gokhale would have obtained a position of distinction in any parliament in the world, even in the British House of Commons. Widely as we differed, I never failed to recognize either his abilities or his high character."

To narrate the chronicle of Gokhale's life to the members of the Servants of India Society or to citizens of Poona is akin to the proverbial idiocy of carrying to Newcastle the ashes of

its own coals. I shall therefore consider today just some aspects of his work—his view of Politics and the spirit which animated his mission.

### **Politics as Pilgrimage :**

In a recent book, *The Theatre of Politics* ( 1972 ), Ferdinand Mount has remarked that our contemporary study of political sociology has yielded three main paradigms of Politics. These he calls, Politics as Battle Politics as Pilgrimage and Politics as Science.

The first concerns politics in terms of the acquisition and maintenance of power. Its origins can be traced, theoretically at least, to Thomas Hobbes and to Machiavelli but such politics is a familiar part of the history of all nations. Those who are anxious to maintain themselves in power would have us believe that if they are dislodged the result would be an oppressive anarchy. Moreover, since all is fair in love and war, such a view of Politics tends to ignore the uncomfortable questions of ends and means and ethical notions which make cowards of us all ! The leaders often say, “ We shall fight to the last ”, “ The battle will be long and hard ”, “ We must survive if there is to be a future for the country ”. Such slogans have a familiar ring and it is unnecessary to cite contemporary Indian examples. Even during Gokhale’s time, his great contemporary Tilak sometimes came dangerously close to this position. The second type views Politics as a great movement progressing towards some kind of Utopia or Shrine. It rests on an idea of progress and serves to give the leaders a feeling of moving ahead. There is often a dislike for tradition which brings on them attacks from the guardians of the past. Finally, the third approach to Politics regards it as a kind of rational activity, the ‘ structure ’ of which can be identified. There is an order and a pattern in political movements.

In actual political experience the elements of all the three paradigms are combined, and they provide us with a useful way of looking at politics within nations. It seems to me that Gokhale’s approach to Politics was predominantly of the second category, i. e., Politics as Pilgrimage. Pandit Kunzru’s monograph, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale* ( 1966 ) is significantly subtitled,

“The Man and his Mission”. Let us look a little deeper into this aspect of Gokhale’s life and work.

The year 1902 marked a watershed in Gokhale’s meteoric career. Till this time it had been a period of preparation and training for leadership. In 1885 he had joined the New English School as assistant master and in the following year he became a life-member of the Deccan Education Society. His teaching work at the Fergusson College must have been strenuous but he soon established his reputation as a great teacher. Although his own subject was Mathematics, he found himself teaching a variety of subjects, English, History and Political Economy, as it was called in those days. “In fact, one cannot but think that his seniors exploited somewhat ruthlessly their junior’s many-sided ability”, wrote Charles Kincaid several years later. But being a determined teacher he enjoyed his ‘freedom to teach’. He believed that at that stage of the country’s development it was not proper for a teacher to specialize. His colleagues humorously referred to him as ‘professor to order’. Apart from his teaching he wrote for the *Mahratha* and the *Sudharak*. In 1888 he was elected Secretary of the Bombay Provincial Conference. In 1890 he became Secretary of the Sarvajanik Sabha and editor of its *Quarterly*. Even at this early period one notices Gokhale’s intense ambition, what David McClelland has called the “achievement motivation”.

An interesting episode took place at the time of the magnificent reception given to Dadabhai Naoroji at Poona on the eve of his departure to Lahore to preside over the Congress Session. Gokhale who was just 27 at this time, full of enthusiasm and ambition, was not content with merely participating in the function. He wanted to be seen as a ‘personal aide-de-camp to the renowned President’. There was no room in the carriage which took the Grand Old Man, Dinshaw Wacha and two other Congressmen to Hirabag where the function had been arranged. But Gokhale was not to be deterred; he was so insistent that they had to gratify his desire by letting him sit on the coach-box. Wacha, years later, spoke of “the glee and brightness on his countenance as he joyously took his seat there. It was the glee of gratification at the fact that at last he had been

able to satisfy his ardent youthful desire to serve Mr. Dadabhoy. To him it was a red-letter day in his nascent political career. And I also recollect how all along the route he joined heartily in the loud cheers and hurrahs of the people, often waving his white handkerchief as if to stimulate them." Twelve years later, Gokhale himself was to get a similar reception at Benares as the President-elect of the Congress.

The episode illustrates Gokhale's youthful ambition as also his capacity for hero-worship. It was this quality which had seized him a few years earlier when he had been introduced to Ranade. So great was his reverence for the guru that he would never sit in his presence. He let the Master mould his personality and submitted to his rigorous discipline which was the most powerful factor in his life. Many sleepless nights were spent hunting up materials from government records and drafting petitions and memoranda. Ranade's influence nourished the young man's ideals and gave him an unmistakable sense of direction in his future political career. T. K. Shahani has beautifully described this *guru-chela* relationship; "Gokhale's mind was like a ploughed and manured soil anxiously awaiting a fertilizing shower; and Ranade's was like the atmosphere of Western India in the rainy season, full of clouds ready to pour down for the advantage of a thirsty soil... If there was at this time any mind in Maharashtra more receptive than the rest to the teachings of this great guru it was Gokhale's. His unsophisticated nature and reverence bordering on humility, his burning desire for achievement and his tremendous capacity for work greatly assisted by a good physical frame, made him the very best material for moulding into anything that the master spirit of the age might direct."

Under Ranade's influence, Gokhale developed his extraordinary capacity for work and we are told that on one occasion the drafting of a memorandum involved continuous sitting for 22 hours ! More than this, his apprenticeship to the great man sharpened his understanding of politics under a colonial regime and deepened his insights. Gokhale once expressed his sense of frustration with the routine response of government to the memorials which were so carefully prepared. Ranade told him:

“ You don't realise your place in the history of our country. These memorials are nominally addressed to Government; in reality, they are addressed to the people, so that they may learn how to think in these matters. This work must be done for many years without expecting any results, because politics of this kind is altogether new in this land. Besides, if Government note the contents of what we say, even that is something.”

The friendship which bound master and pupil has few parallels in our history and even in the West one can only think of the relationship between Harold Laski and Justice Holmes who was many years his senior. But that was a friendship of a different kind. About Ranade and Gokhale, J. B. Raju writes: “ The story of this friendship is one of the most beautiful romances in modern Indian history. For years they were engaged together in the close study of the progress and destiny of nations, the inner meaning of public events, the far-off results of action, the discipline of failure, service and sacrifice, and the infinite play of human motive and passion, not only in profound treatises of political philosophy but also in the ephemeral effusions of the daily press and in the red, green and blue books of government publications. Surely, there is no fairer sight on earth than the close communion of two such kindred spirits and it has brought untold blessings in its train on us all.”

Gokhale's discipleship and rigorous training lasted through the fourteen years of his friendship with Ranade and when the latter died in 1901 he felt orphaned and never found the world the same again. The following year he resigned from the Fergusson College having decided to plunge into the troubled politics of the time. This second period of his life marked his most lasting contribution to public life and to the constitutional development of the country. But he took the plunge with a sense of loneliness for he had at that time no one to depend upon. During the eighteen years of his career as a teacher he had left a profound impression on his students as more than one of his distinguished pupils has testified. His passion for politics was reflected in his teaching, particularly in the later years when problems of public concern and political questions received his most thorough attention. Gokhale saw education as part of the

larger process of the country's all-rounded development or, as we would say these days, of modernization. He had not just gone into teaching like drift-wood. It had been the result of a deep conviction. He had pledged his life for twenty years on a paltry sum of Rs. 75. It was the beginning of a great career of sacrifice and it meant some resistance from his elder brother Govinda Rao who had struggled through penury to have him educated. The events of all these years must have come back to his memory at this time of leaving the Fergusson College but he was thinking not about himself but about his country. This is reflected in that most moving speech which he made on the occasion of the farewell. It is among the most beautiful things I have read. I therefore crave your indulgence to let me read out some lines from this great piece :

“ Many years ago I remember to have read the story of a man, who lived by the side of the sea, who had a nice cottage and fields that yielded him their abundance, and who was surrounded by a loving family. The world thought that he was very happy. But to him the sea had a strange fascination. When it lay gently heaving like an infant asleep, it appealed to him; when it raged like an angry and roaring lion, it still appealed to him; till at last he could withstand the fatal fascination no longer. And so having disposed of everything and put his all into a boat, he launched it on the bosom of the sea. Twice was he beaten back by the waves—a warning he would not heed. He made a third attempt when the pitiless sea overwhelmed him. To a certain extent this seems to me to be my position to-day. Here I am with a settled position in this College, and having for my colleagues men with whom it is a pleasure and a privilege to work, and whose generosity in overlooking my many faults and magnifying any little services I may have rendered, has often touched me deeply. And yet, I am giving up all this to embark on the stormy and uncertain sea of public life. But I hear within me a voice which urges me to take this course and I can only ask you to believe me when I say that it is purely from a sense of duty to the best interests of our country, that I am seeking this position of greater freedom, but not necessarily of less responsibility. Public life in this country has few rewards and many trials and discouragements. The prospect



of work to be done is vast, and no one can say what is on the other side — how all this work may end. But one thing is clear. Those who feel in the matter as I do must devote themselves to the work in a spirit of hope and faith and seek only the satisfaction which comes of all disinterested exertions. This is not the place where I may speak of my future hopes or lines of work. But one thing I know, and it is this : Whether I am permitted to press onwards and prove of some little use to the public in another capacity, or whether I have to return a weather-beaten, tempest-tost, ship-wrecked mariner, my thoughts, as you have said in your address, will constantly be with this institution; and on the other hand, I shall always be sure of a warm and hospitable welcome within these walls, whenever I choose to come ”.

At the close of World War I, the German sociologist, Max Weber, made a speech at Munich University intitled “ Politics as Vocation ” which could have been an equally apt title for my talk today. In the course of this speech, Weber said that there were two ways of making politics one’s vocation : either one lives ‘for’ politics or one lives ‘off’ politics. Gokhale provides the classic example of one who lived *for* politics and made it his life’s vocation. “ Mr. Gokhale’s political career ”, wrote Wacha in 1915, “ was unique in one respect, namely, that no Indian till now had carved out his career so exclusively and so disinterestedly.” He brought to his work exceptional qualities of head and heart.

From 1902 until his death in 1915 we have the greatest and the most fruitful period of his public life. This was public in every sense of the word. His private life had more or less collapsed. His second wife had passed away in 1900 and Rishi Ranade in 1901. In 1905 was established the Servants of India Society, the product of his idealism, a great move forward in the realization of his dream of building up enlightened public life in the country. He was now, and henceforth, inseparable from the institution. He had no life to call his own. In her reminiscences of her father, his daughter Mrs. Kashibai Dhavle, speaking on All India Radio in 1956, recalled how she used to meet him on occasions at the Servants of India Society. “ Once

we had to wait for a very long time, owing to an unending stream of visitors and had to come away without seeing him. We had to go to school next morning without our home-work done. I heard later that he had passed a sleepless night on that account which had already caused him not a few tears." It was this complete identification with the Society and his work that imparts significance to the fact that its Constitution had made Gokhale First Member for life.

One of the popular theories of leadership today emphasizes the peculiar circumstances in which a leader's life is cast and which brings forth the best in him. What were the conditions when Gokhale decided to make politics his vocation ?

Public life in India was showing signs of a new ferment. Already in the eighties of the last century the educated classes were becoming articulate and demanded a share in the administration of the country. The spirit of nationalism was turning from bitterness to anger as a result of the repressive and generally unresponsive character of the bureaucracy. It had become unimaginative and inward-looking. There were, as every well-informed student of modern Indian history knows, some remarkable and conscientious men in the civil service. But with the growing intensity of nationalism it was becoming a conservative force eager to maintain the *status quo*. A sense of arrogance not unmingled with a feeling of racial superiority was widespread and officials often spoke with contempt of the educated babus. The claims of the latter to speak on behalf of the unlettered masses were dismissed as pretentious nonsense; only the officials with their experience in the districts could know what was good for the people of India. What the country needed, therefore, was efficiency in administration; good government, not self-government.

The brief flicker of liberalism under Ripon was dying out and his policies were scuttled by officers in the provincial governments. The civil service which clothed itself in a theory of enlightened paternalism was becoming despotic; in the language of Percival Spear, "the government could be described as paternalism tempered by consultation." The unpopularity of British administration in India reached its climax during the

vicerealty of Lord Curzon. In his presidential address to the Benaras session of the Congress, Gokhale compared Curzon with emperor Aurangzeb and, in his own characteristically subdued vein, he said : " His wonderful intellectual gifts, his brilliant powers of expression, his phenomenal energy, his boundless enthusiasm for work — these will ever be the theme of just and unstinted praise. But the gods are jealous, and amidst such lavish endowments, they withheld from him a sympathetic imagination without which no man can ever understand an alien people; and it is a sad truth that at the end of his administration Lord Curzon did not really understand the people of India." Personally, Curzon had regard for Gokhale but, as S. Gopal notes, he never utilized his services and even rebuked the Governor of Bombay for attaching too much importance to Gokhale and the Servants of India Society.

Gokhale's criticism of the bureaucracy and of its administration were many and he dealt with them year after year in his budget speeches. Despite all previous promises, Indians had been excluded from service in many branches of government. The bureaucracy had grown and with it the level of taxation. Strangely enough, the annual budgets showed financial surpluses while nation-building activities suffered neglect. Large sums were being spent on standing battalions which military experts had considered superfluous. Famines visited the countryside with greater frequency than what earlier history had recorded. Famine administration showed several defects. Gokhale's observations on this aspect and other problems of rural development are still of immense value to us. How little village India has changed! In 1905 he dealt with the problems of the agriculturist—the burden of taxes on the land, indebtedness, the deterioration of soils and the scarcity of credit which made the peasant " simply unable to make proper use of Nature's wealth that lies at his door." He pleaded for policies which would eventually lighten the burdens on the poor. After all, he had grown in their midst. Hoyland, writes "... he, unlike others knew in his own person what the real India, the India of villages, actually is and feels and thinks. However high he might rise, he was always at heart a man of the people, a member of an immemorial peasant community."

There were other aspects of the situation which invited Gokhale's attention. New classes of people unfamiliar with the nature of British rule and the spirit of her greatest administrators had emerged. Young minds had been unsettled; violence was in the air. As Srinivasa Sastri observed, "Physical courage was sedulously cultivated; *lathi* play became the chief pastime of youth; an affray with the police was celebrated as an encounter with tyranny, and martial honours were given to young men on whose bodies constables had left marks of their anger." It was this unrest of new India which was cracking up the foundation of political life. Inevitably, it expressed itself in the cleavage of opinion between the moderates and the extremists as they came to be known. Gokhale viewed these developments with a sense of uneasiness because he was convinced that in the long run they would hamper the growth of orderly constitutional development in the country. Public life, as he saw it, was a plant of slow growth. It had to be watered and tended with care. Political extremism and violence could only disrupt it. I shall return to this aspect of his politics presently.

One of the acrimonious controversies in Gokhale's days related to the priority between matters of social and political reform. Gokhale himself was not much worked up on this score. He had learnt from Ranade that one could not take an exclusive view of political questions. He was as aware as anybody else of the problems of social reform. If India did not wish to progress at all and was content to remain where she was a thousand years ago, he once said, then it would not be necessary to change the caste system at all. But caste had become a hindrance to social progress. The condition of the depressed classes needed to be changed but this was only possible gradually. And who, speaking a quarter century after independence, can question the validity of this position? I may also add in passing that Gokhale's interest in the education of women stemmed partly from his belief that women were the carriers of social practices which were no longer conducive to progress. Their intensely religious natures deprived of intellectual development had made them effective opponents of innovation.

Social reform questions produced fierce differences of opinion. In Poona, the centre of these activities, much dust was raised and mud-slinging was common. In its semi-traditional society with its face-to-face patterns of social communication much gossip circulated from person to person. The conservative elements lent themselves to easy manipulation and Tilak worked them up. Tilak was a great man, loved by the people and hated by the government. He was hard as granite and his courage and fortitude compel admiration. Of his intense patriotism there can be no doubt whatsoever. But as R. P. Paranjpe remarked, throughout his whole life Tilak " never learnt the simple fact that two persons can differ on one point while agreeing and co-operating on several others." He held his opponents up to ridicule. His political methods were controversial, to say the least, but it is unnecessary to go into them here. The moderate school of Gokhale, and the social reformers in particular, were at the receiving end of severe attack and ridicule which bordered on the obscene.

Ranade once described Poona as the intellectual capital of Western India and Bombay as its suburb. There were then many great men who through their efforts in many fields had succeeded in putting the city on the political map of India. But as in ancient Athens, intense political activity and great moral idealism existed cheek by jowl with many unsavoury aspects of human nature. Gokhale's concern for truth and fair-play and his own highly sensitive nature caused him much mental strain and many unhappy hours. Ironically, he had fewer problems of this kind from the bureaucracy or even from the Viceroy whom he attacked unsparingly than he had from his own compatriots. The way he was condemned and ridiculed during the Apology incident is only one of the many that can be cited. In some ways, Poona had the qualities of a closed society. On February 8, 1896, he wrote in deep anguish to G. V. Joshi : "... I have besides grown absolutely sick of the public life of Poona. Recent events have opened my eyes very wide indeed, and I am anxious to be relieved of all public responsibilities and to lead hereafter an entirely retired life." He added : " Of course, a great deal depends yet on Mr. Ranade's wishes, for I don't wish to do anything that would in any way displease him. But personally I wish now to wash my hands of all political work

in Poona. There is so much that is selfish and ignoble here that I would fly from it to the furthest extremities of the world if I could."

Politics in Poona, surely, could not have been worse than elsewhere. Human nature is the same. Perhaps, the fault lay with Gokhale's own sensitive nature and his perception of the moral nature of political activities. When Aristotle said that Man is a political animal he could have added that one needs to be a pachyderm to be in politics. A thick skin is often necessary for the political animal. Of all the politicians of his time, Gokhale had the thinnest skin, and although he expressed a desire to withdraw from political activities it was not in his nature to do so. Max Weber, whom I have cited earlier, has said, "Only he has the calling of politics who is sure that he shall not crumble when the world from his point of view is too stupid or too base for what he wants to offer. Only he who in the face of all this can say 'In spite of all!' has the calling for politics." There can be no doubt that Gokhale passes this Weberian test splendidly. A sense of fortitude was the greatest quality which we had imbibed from his teacher Ranade.

### **The Foundations of Public Life**

The immense task of building up an enlightened and prosperous polity, as Gokhale saw it, involved changes in many directions. In the first place, the bureaucratic form of administration needed to be reformed on liberal principles, enabling wider participation as well as more effective popular control. Gokhale argued that the official notion of efficiency was mechanistic and too narrowly conceived. There was a higher kind of efficiency which stemmed from a genuine concern for the human element and this was only possible through greater participation by people in the processes of government. The greatest evil arising from the exclusion of Indians from the administration was a "steady dwarfing of the race." It produces frustration and "a discontented frame of mind". What was most important, therefore, was the institutional framework within which people could grow up as responsible citizens. Gokhale thus anticipated, by at least a decade, the ideal expressed in Edwin Montagu's Declaration of August 20th, 1917.

One of the valuable suggestions he made related to the creation of District Advisory Councils to help Collectors keep touch with problems of local administration. This was necessary, he argued, in view of the excessive centralization which then existed. Collectors were doing more desk-work than their predecessors had done and were therefore unable to have direct acquaintance with the needs of the people. There was also less incentive to master local languages. Gokhale's plea for decentralization rested on his faith that it would help in raising the civic spirit and intelligence of the people. Finally, he criticised the needless secrecy in the operations of government, the hyper-sensitiveness of officials and the clumsiness of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Then, as now, the masses were, to use his language, "inert and apathetic, except under the sway of a religious impulse". Moreover, he saw them "deplorably divided and subdivided, with hardly any sense of discipline, plunged in abject poverty and ignorance, and wedded to usages and institutions ... which were not exactly calculated to promote vigorous, sustained or combined action for purposes of progress." Gokhale attached the utmost importance to education in the task of strengthening the foundations of public life. He viewed it as a powerful lever for raising the intellectual level of the masses and widening their mental horizon. It would make them self-reliant and better protected "against the exaction of unscrupulous money-lenders or against the abuses of official authority by petty men in power." Education was the foundation of all economic activity, in industry as well as agriculture and it would eventually ensure the equitable distribution of the fruits of labour. Finally, universal education was indispensable for social advance. An unenlightened mass of citizens can only lend themselves to manipulation by demagogues. Gokhale had seen this happen in his own time and it served to reinforce his conviction in the lasting value of universal education.

In his classic presentation of *The Life of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Srinivasa Sastri expressed the doubt "whether, after all, his political work, superb as it was, was more valuable in the long run than the totality of his educational labours". But the

educational and the political perspectives were only two aspects of Gokhale's vision of politics as a pilgrimage. As a teacher of History in the Fergusson College, his lectures had provided him ample opportunities for digressing on the problems of contemporary politics. He had laid great stress on the study of European History and of the British Constitution. "To my mind, the greatest work of Western education", Gokhale observed in 1903, "is not so much the encouragement of learning as the liberation of the Indian mind from the thralldom of old-world ideas...". This is why, even after he had left the portals of the Fergusson College, his political work involved his continuous interest in educational questions.

Public life involves its own discipline and people have to be trained for the management of free institutions. One of the bitter controversies in Gokhale's days centered on the techniques of political agitation and on this question he differed greatly from Tilak. The point, as Gokhale understood it, was not one of moderation or extremism but the extent to which the methods chosen contributed to orderly constitutional development. Even public protest must be so organized as to teach people their responsibilities. He was probably thinking of John Hampden and Ship Money when he said that the refusal to pay taxes had "the merit of bringing home to each man the responsibility of his own action." But nothing must be done to disrupt the foundations of public order. Gokhale's speeches frequently remind us of Burke whom he rarely quoted although it is common knowledge that he knew some of his works by heart.

Everything that was 'constitutional', he warned, was not necessarily the wise thing to do. Gokhale was concerned with the implications of political action in the perspective of the future. If politics is viewed as a pilgrimage the ethical character of the means adopted becomes important; public life must rest and function on moral and ethical principles. As Gokhale put it, 'public life must be spiritualized'.

It is not enough for a political worker to have patriotism. Politics is made by the heart as well as by the head. His concern for the public and its problems must compel him to devote many hours to the dispassionate study of political



questions. It may be necessary for him to express views or stand by causes which are not popular. As Walter Lippmann has expressed it, "The capacity to act upon the hidden realities of a situation in spite of appearances is the essence of statesmanship. It consists in giving people not what they want but what they will learn to want. It requires the courage which is possible only in a mind that is detached from the agitations of the moment. It requires the insight which comes only from an objective and discerning knowledge of the facts, and a high imperturbable disinterestedness." There is a problem here. As Max Weber asked, "how can warm passion and a cool sense of proportion be forged together in one and the same soul?" Gokhale sought the answer to this dilemma in institutionalized political training and his aim in establishing the Servants of India Society was to train up a band of political sanyasins. Such a thing had never been done before. It embodied an ideal which is the core of politics as pilgrimage.

The principle of rigorous discipline, as the basis of leadership in the political field was worked into the very first draft of the constitution of the Servants of India Society, which required every member to take a vow of absolute obedience to the First Member for a period of five years. This was subsequently modified as a result of the criticism from Principal Selby who said that the condition "reads to an Englishman rather like a rule of a Russian secret society." But there was no question of relaxing on the essence of discipline. As Sastri observed many years later, Gokhale had inside knowledge of college life which made him insist on such rigour. Moreover, had he not himself submitted voluntarily to the most arduous training under his own master, Ranade ?

The Society embodied the noble idea of service. He who serves in any great cause must find himself in a situation of leadership. To lead is to have a clear sense of direction of a cause to which one surrenders completely. One must have a dream and be possessed by it. As the preamble to the Society's Constitution put it, "Love of country must so fill the heart that all else shall appear as of little moment by its side. A fervent patriotism which rejoices at every opportunity of sacrifice

for the motherland, a dauntless heart which refuses to be turned back from its object by difficulty or danger, a deep faith in the purpose of Providence which nothing can shake—equipped with these, the worker must start on his mission and reverently seek the joy which comes from spending oneself in the service of one's country." This passage is, incidentally the best tribute that we can give to Gokhale this day. He was the embodiment of this ideal, a true Servant of India.

What was the sustaining element in Gokhale's life ? Although he rarely spoke of God there is no doubt that a religious faith was the source of his strength through all the vicissitudes of his life. "As far as I can judge", Sastri remarks, "he felt during his later life that he lived and functioned under the guidance of some unseen power which he felt about him." Among his intimate papers was found one written early in 1898 which mentioned the things he resolved to achieve "By the grace of Sree Guru Dattatreya.". In his talk on Ranade he spoke with reverence of his master's "humble faith in the purpose of Providence that nothing shook" and he wanted political workers trained under his care "to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit." It was this quality in Gokhale that appealed to Gandhi most. His testimony is worth quoting. "Gokhale's life was that of a man of religion. Everything he did was done in the spirit of a devotee as I can testify. Gokhale once called himself an agnostic. He observed that he had not, but wished he had, Ranade's faith. Even so I could discern a religious strain in his work. It would not be improper to say that his very doubt was inspired by religion. A man who leads a dedicated life, who is simple in habits, who is the very image of truth, who is full of humanity, who calls nothing his own—such a man is a man of religion, whether he himself is or is not conscious of it. Such was Gokhale as I could see during the twenty years of my friendship with him."

Gokhale's passion for politics and his love for the land of his birth had a quality which enables us to view it in terms of the spirit of religion. But it was combined with other qualities which marked him off from most of his contemporaries. The historian Fisher who worked with him on the Public Services

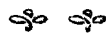
Commission said : “ In talent and character he was extraordinary, combining in a singular degree the visionary qualities of the Indian life. Even in India, whose saints are not uncommon, Gokhale’s saintliness shone with a peculiar lustre, for not only was he utterly disinterested in his pursuit of patriotic ends, caring nothing for wealth and station, but his rare spiritual intensity was united to subtlety of mind, a quiet grasp of detail and a gift of action—qualities that are not usually associated with the devotional temperament of the East.”

The description of Gokhale which I have presented to you will probably appear to an audience constituted differently from the one today as that of “ a plaster saint ”—beautiful, perhaps, but hardly human. Those who knew him have left us various accounts, mentioning, occasionally, some of his weaknesses. Dinshaw Wacha tells us that he was a simple man but hardly a good judge of human nature and “ would often fall into the snares of the designing and the astute.” He also tells us that Gokhale was “ exceedingly sensitive to criticism ” and would seek to force his opinions on others. He cites a contemporary who is said to have remarked in fun that “ Mr. Gokhale was a greater despot than the bureaucrat whom he would criticise for entertaining dogmatic opinions and growing impatient of outside criticism.” Srinivasa Sastri has narrated some of his amiable foibles. One of Gokhale’s childlike amusements was to watch Sastri speak Tamil with a gentleman from the South who used to visit the Servants of India Society in the early years. The sounds of the language afforded ample entertainment and Gokhale would gather all those present to watch the performance. Sastri also tells us how Gokhale would with great pride speak of *saram* for *rasam* to show off his knowledge of the language ! And we know of an episode, which took place when Gokhale was in the Fergusson College, from that endearing biography by his pupil T. K. Shahani. It was the *Haldi-Kunku* season: the women were busy and so the men got together to prepare ice-cream. Gokhale had not known what it tasted like and was seized by an impatient curiosity. His friends let him taste a little of the brackish ice-water from the bucket, and taste of it he promptly did ! Shahani remarks

that this “almost stupid ignorance of common things in life clung to him all through.”

There are other such episodes but they are not many if one is to go by the recorded evidence. The penury of his youth, personal misfortunes and the responsibilities that were heaped upon him first as teacher and later as a public figure probably froze the lighter elements in his nature. But the greatness of his character has not dimmed with the passage of years and never will. We have had in our land people who may have excelled Gokhale in one quality or another. We have had orators who have won the admiration of the English speaking world and many minds steeped in ancient lore as well as in modern fields of knowledge. We have had erudite authorities on questions of finance and public expenditure. There are others of unimpeachable character who held aloft great ethical ideals and at least one among them has left it to posterity to debate whether he was a saint among politicians or a politician among saints. But what distinguishes Gokhale from the rest, as Sivaswami Aiyer rightly notes, was “the combination of abilities with a lofty character and the highest ideals of a life of self-renunciation with strenuous and incessant work for the advancement of his country.” One is reminded of the lines from Shakespeare :

His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mix'd up that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world ' This was a man ! '



CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- 1866 Birth on May 9 at Kotluk in Chiplun Taluka, Ratnagiri Dist.
- 1876 Migrated to Kolhapur for education.
- 1879 Death of his father.
- 1880 Was married.  
New English school was started in Poona
- 1881 Matriculated.
- 1882 Studied in Rajaram College, Kolhapur
- 1883 Studied in Deccan College, Poona
- 1884 Studied in Elphinstone College, Bombay, and took the B. A. Degree.  
Joined Law Class.  
Formation of the Deccan Education Society.
- 1885 Joined the New English School as Assistant Master  
Fergusson College opened.  
Maintained coaching establishment for Public Service Certificate Examination.
- 1886 Became Life Member of the Deccan Education Society and began teaching in Fergusson College.  
Wrote frequently to the Mahratta.  
First introduced to M. G. Ranade by S. H. Sathe  
First Public speech at Kolhapur on India under the British rule.
- 1887 Married second time
- 1888 Edited English section of the *Sudharak*.  
Elected Secretary, Bombay Provincial Conference.  
Public Speech (perhaps not delivered) upholding the action of Lord Reay in the Crawford case.

- 1889 First participation in the Indian National Congress, held at Bombay.
- 1890 Elected Secretary of the Sarvajanik Sabha and Editor of its Quarterly.  
Spoke at Calcutta Congress on the reduction of salt duty.  
Tilak resigned from the Deccan Education Society.
- 1891 Appointed Secretary of the Deccan Education Society.  
Spoke at Nagpur Congress  
Death of his first wife.
- 1892 Spoke at Allahabad Congress on Public Services.
- 1893 Death of his mother.  
Engaged in collection of funds for the Deccan Education Society.
- 1895 Worked as Secretary to the Reception Committee of the Indian National Congress which met in Poona.  
Elected Fellow of the Bombay University.  
Editor of the *Rashtra Sabha Samachar*.
- 1896 Resigned Secretaryship of the Sarvajanik Sabha and Editorship of its Quarterly.  
Helped in organizing the Deccan Sabha of which he became the first Secretary.  
First meeting with Gandhiji.
- 1897 First visit to England. Evidence before the Welby Commission.  
Plague measures in Poona. Publication in England of complaints on the subject.  
First meeting with John Morley.  
Return from England. The Apology incident.
- 1898 Took prominent part in plague relief work in Poona.
- 1899 Elected Member of the Bombay Legislative Council.  
Criticised famine relief measures of Government.
- 1900 Death of his second wife.

- 1901      Opposed Land Alienation Bill, Walk-out from the Council.  
Opposed introduction of the communal principle in the District Municipalities Bill.  
Supported Temperance Movement.  
Elected to the Imperial Legislative Council.  
Death of Ranade.
- 1902      Retired from the Fergusson College.  
Budget speech : Criticised Government's financial policy in respect of—  
1.    Currency surpluses;  
2.    High level of taxation;  
3.    Salt duty;  
4.    Army expenditure  
Elected President, Poona Municipality.
- 1903      Budget speech :  
1.    Reduction of salt duty;  
2.    Abolition of excise duty on cotton goods;  
3.    Indianization of services;  
4.    Increased effort for spread of education.  
Elected additional Joint General Secretary to the Congress.  
Gandhiji stayed a month with Gokhale in Calcutta.
- 1904      Received title of C. I. E.  
Budget speech : Criticised increased Army expenditure.  
Opposed the Official Secrets Bill  
Opposed the Indian Universities Bill.
- 1905      Founded the Servants of India Society on 12th June.  
Opposed the Universities Validation Bill.  
Budget speech :  
1.    Reduction of salt duty;  
2.    Pleaded for relief to agriculturists;  
3.    Indianization of services.

- Second visit to England as Congress Delegate to represent India's case, in view of British General Election. Presided over the Indian National Congress at Banaras.
- 1906 Third visit to England to agitate for the prospective Reforms.
- 1907 Death of his brother  
Deportation of Lala Lajpat Rai  
Undertook lecturing tour in Northern India.  
Budget speech :  
1. Urged complete abolition of salt duty;  
2. Pleaded for free primary education;  
3. Pleaded for Constitutional Reforms.  
Congress split at Surat.
- 1908 Evidence before the Decentralisation Commission.  
Fourth visit to England to agitate for the prospective Reforms.  
Announcement of the Morley-Minto Reforms  
Arrest and imprisonment of Lokamanya Tilak.  
Defamation suit against the *Hindu Punch*.  
Indian National Congress at Madras.
- 1909 Declined offer of lecturing tour in America.
- 1910 In the Imperial Legislative Council :  
Moved a Resolution on Indentured Labour to Natal ( adopted )  
Moved a Resolution on Elementary Education ( withdrawn ).  
Criticised the Press Bill.  
Acted as Secretary to Sir W. Wedderburn at Allahabad Congress.  
Founded the Ranade Industrial and Economic Institute.
- 1911 Introduced the Elementary Education Bill.  
Opposed the Seditious Meetings Bill.  
Contributed a paper on 'East and West' to the Universal Races Congress.



- 1912 In the Imperial Council :
- Spoke on the Resolution of Bhupendranath Basu on Police Administration in India.
  - Moved a Resolution on Indentured Labour.
  - Moved a Resolution on resources of local bodies.
  - Defeat of the Elementary Education Bill.
  - Fifth visit to England in connection with the work of the Public Services Commission on which he had been appointed this year
  - Visit to South Africa.
- 1913 Sixth visit to England with the Public Services Commission.
- Raised funds for the South African struggle.
- 1914 Seventh visit to England with the Public Services Commission.
- Declined offer of K. C. I. E.
  - Gandhi-Smuts Agreement.
  - Met Gandhiji in London.
  - Attempted a Congress compromise but failed.
- 1915 Visit of Gandhiji
- Death on 19th February.

From Gopal Krishna Gokhale : The man and his mission.

By

**H. N. Kunzru**

Maharashtra Information Centre, New Delhi, 1966.