

GOKHALE
MY POLITICAL GURU

by
M. K. GANDHI



NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD



Gopal Krishna Gokhale

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

About five years ago the Navajivan collected and published in book form nearly all the Gujarati writings of Gandhiji about Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Ever since that booklet was published there has been a persistent demand for it in English. Gokhale was an all India figure. Many in India and abroad came in close contact with him and had come to love him and his work. His life and work have been an inspiration to many a young man and woman of the generation after him.

Gandhiji saw in Gokhale the ideal servant of India, so much so that he accepted him as his master and endeavoured to set the pattern of his life and work in the political field in India by what he had seen of Gokhale's life and mission.

What specially attracted Gandhiji to his master was the latter's insistence on doing political work in the spirit of religion. Gokhale believed and endeavoured to act according to his belief that politics could be a means of service to the people of India only if it was spiritualized, i.e. if political workers took to their work in the spirit of seekers of Truth. This was as good as Gandhiji's insistence on the purity of means for the achievement of even political ends. Thus both master and disciple were attracted to each other by their common faith.

This lesson from the lives of both these great servants of India is invaluable to the future generations of young men and women who aspire to serve their country. While writing about Gokhale Gandhiji, therefore, brought out this lesson for his readers. The

Navajivan had felt, as also many others, that Gandhiji's writings about Gokhale, which deal in a way also with his own ideal of service, should be available to all earnest minds in India and abroad. It has therefore collected everything written or spoken by him with reference to Gokhale and is publishing it here in English. Accordingly this book contains in it some material not included in the Gujarati edition.

This book will be published on the 19th of this month, the anniversary of Gokhale's death. We feel sure that these writings which reflect the minds of two of the greatest sons of India, who have in our own day influenced the regeneration of our country will prove an inspiration to all those who want to see India progress further.

Ahmedabad, 1-2-'55

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HOMAGE TO GOKHALE

This book * is being published on the thirtyfifth anniversary of Gopal Krishna Gokhale of sacred memory. It is a collection of Gandhiji's writings about that consecrated soul. Gandhiji had accepted him as his master, had followed him in the spirit of a devoted disciple and had been in contact with him for twenty years. What was his life ? How did his character manifest itself in his actions ? What were his aspirations ? What was his message ? What was the heritage he left for his people ? Only a close disciple of Gokhale who had come into intimate touch with him like Gandhiji or Thakkarbapa could give us authoritative answers to these questions.

I did not have the good fortune to know Gokhale myself. I do not remember to have seen or heard him on more than two occasions : once at the Surat session of the Indian National Congress in 1907, and next about the same period (1908-9) when he was presiding over a students' meeting held at the Wilson College, Bombay. But my ears even today carry the impression that his voice had the sweetness of a silver bell. A few days before the meeting at which he presided I had heard one of my teachers, Professor Robertson, say that he had never heard an Indian speak English so grammatically correct and so pure in pronunciation as Gokhale. So when I heard him speak, I was probably more interested in the manner of his speech than in its matter.

But an incident in connection with this meeting is worth recording. The meeting was organized by the

* The reference is to the Gujarati edition published in 1950.

Students' Union. This Union was an association of students of all the colleges of Bombay. Shri Manu Subedar was to speak on the subject: Uplift of the Suppressed Classes, and Gokhale had consented to preside over the meeting. Expecting that the meeting would be large, permission was sought from the Principal, Dr. Machichan, to hold it in the Wilson College. I was not an office-bearer of the Union, but its Secretary was a friend of mine and I was assisting him. On the day of the meeting or perhaps the day before, the Principal created a serious difficulty. He called the Secretary and said to him, 'Mr Gokhale is after all a political worker. I cannot have him dealing with political subjects here. So please go and get his consent that he will not touch on political topics in his speech.' My friend objected, 'The subject proposed is one of social reform. It has no connection with politics; where then is the need for such a condition?' But the Principal persisted, 'These politicians are not to be trusted. They have a knack of bringing all sorts of topics into their speeches. So please go and get his consent on the lines I have indicated or my hall will not be available to you.' This was disturbing indeed! My friend felt that this condition was intended to insult Gokhale. How could one dare to make such an absurd proposition to him? But what was one to do? There was hardly any time to arrange the meeting elsewhere. And having the meeting elsewhere after what the Principal had demanded would have meant that the Union changed the venue of the meeting only because it was intent on taking part in politics. This would have afforded an easy opportunity to the college authorities who were bent upon breaking the Union.

My friend was embarrassed. With trembling fingers he wrote a note to Gokhale. Gokhale sent a reply. The suggestion had offended him and he declined to preside over the meeting.

The embarrassment of my friend increased. Let me describe the developments thereafter in his own words :

"I had not the courage to go and tell Dr. Machichan that the condition he was imposing was unfair. I went and saw Mr Gokhale instead. I hesitated to tell him what the Principal wanted but ultimately I did. His first reaction was one of indignation and he said to me, 'This is an insult to me. I cannot consent to preside on such terms.' I was on the verge of crying. I said, 'Everyone will come and abuse me saying that I had cheated them by giving out a false report that you were going to preside over the meeting.' Mr Gokhale took pity on me. He reassured me by saying, 'Please do not be hurt at what I say. But our people have absolutely no sense of moral indignation. I feel it is my duty not to submit to this.' He then narrated some incidents to show how our people meekly suffer ill treatment and insults at the hands of superiors without a word of protest. He ended up, however, by saying, 'I shall come, but on one condition, that you promise to convey to Dr. Machichan as from me that he had no right to order what I was to say or not to say in my speech.' I gave the promise. I was agitated and nervous before I conveyed Gokhale's message to Dr. Machichan. But I did convey it. Dr. Machichan saw wisdom in giving way. So at last Mr Gokhale came to the meeting and delivered his thought-provoking speech as president."

This is all the one-sided personal contact I had with Gokhale.

The writings in this booklet show that Gandhiji perceived a reflection of his own life of service in the mirror of Gokhale's life. I shall make an attempt here to give briefly the lessons and the ideals he evidently derived from Gokhale's life :

"Gokhale pledged himself to the task of imparting education for twenty years. Education becomes fruitful only when men of such spirit devote their lives to the cause of education."

"It is very essential that at least a few young men who would give their lives to politics come forward from every province in India."

"His life is very simple; indeed, it may be called severely austere....He has devoted his life to poverty and knowledge like a true Brahmana. Better examples of the ancient Indian way of plain living, high thinking and high doing can hardly be found."

"He is carrying the burden of the Empire on his shoulders, alone, without aid, without servants who would carry out his commands, and without honours or titles."

"He is an example of meekness and goodness for Indians who have received Western education."

"Whatever he did, enjoyed, sacrificed; whatever charity he practised; whatever austerities he underwent; all this he surrendered at the feet of Mother India."

"I shall have lived to some purpose only if I see Hari (the Lord) face to face as I laugh and play. O Uddhava, Krishna, Muktananda's Master, is the Lord of our life.— This was Gokhale's attitude of surrender and devotion to India."

"The duty of those who would serve India is to transform the political life of India into a life of religion."

"My soul testifies that whatever he did and on whatever occasion was done in the spirit of religion."

"The man who leads the life of goodness, whose instincts are good, who is full of gentleness, who is the embodiment of truth and who has fully shed his ego, is a *dharmatma*, a man of religion whether he knows it or not."

"A *sannyasi* accused Gokhale that he was not sufficiently proud of Hinduism. Mahatma Gokhale raised his brows and in a voice that would have pierced the heart replied: If Hinduism consists in doing as you say (boasting that the Hindus are superior and in looking down on the Mussalmans) then take it that I am not a Hindu. Please go and leave me alone."

"The mission (of service of my country) which I have

undertaken under nobody's orders, I cannot give up at anybody's bidding. It would be well if I can keep popular opinion on my side while performing my duty; but it would matter little even if I am not so fortunate as to have the people's support."

"All of us cannot enter the Central Legislative Council; cannot be on the Public Service Commission; cannot attain Gokhale's learning. Nor is it our experience that all those (who have been able to do these things) are servants of the country. But all of us can surely cultivate the virtues of fearlessness, truthfulness, courage, meekness, fairness, straightforwardness, firmness and such like and devote them to the service of the country. This is the spirit of religion. This is the meaning of the great saying, 'let us spiritualize politics'....Only thus shall we share the heritage of Mahatma Gokhale."

"It is within the reach of everyone of us to identify ourselves with the work in hand."

"I do not much care for my personal honour. But I value the honour of my country as I value my own life."

"His health was delicate throughout the period (he was in South Africa). Great care was needed. But in spite of his poor health he would work late into the night, up to twelve o'clock, and be up again by four or even two o'clock and ask for his papers."

"He burned with indignation as if the burden imposed on his poor brothers (in South Africa) was imposed on himself. He tried all the power of his soul before General Botha. His pleading had such a powerful effect on both Generals Botha and Smuts that they relented and promised him that....the levy would be abolished."

".....The problem of the uplift of the untouchable classes disturbed Gokhale's peace of mind everyday.....If someone criticized him for it, he would say to him plainly that we were not polluted by touching our brother, the untouchable, but by falling a prey to the wicked feeling that we should not touch him."

Gandhiji called Gokhale a Mahatma in all these quotations. Gandhiji himself had till then not become a Mahatma and Gokhale was known as the Honourable

Mr Gokhale to the Indian public. But Gandhiji thought of him as an ideal Mahatma in his own heart, gave him a place therein, aspired to the realization of that ideal in himself, and in his own life manifested on a larger scale whatever virtues he perceived in his master. The world saw it, and of its own accord gladly bestowed on Gandhiji the status and title it had not given to his master. The child or the disciple who manifests the virtues of the parents or the master on such a scale that the world forgets the latter is indeed their true heir. Gokhale left behind him such disciples as Gandhi, Shastri, Devdhar, Thakkar and others who developed his virtues in their own lives and who raised many new institutions for service out of the one he had founded.

Rarely does a disciple find a true master and equally rarely does a master find a true disciple. But rarer still is the phenomenon of both finding each other which creates a sense of fulfilment in both and conduces to the welfare of the world.

आश्चर्यो वक्ता कुशलस्य लब्धाऽऽश्चर्यो ज्ञाता
कुशलानुशिष्टः । त्वाद्गुणो भूयान्चिकेतः प्रष्टा ॥

(Wonderful is the teacher, and equally clever the pupil. Wonderful indeed is he who comprehends it when taught by an able perceptor. O Nachiketas, may we often get enquirers like thee !) Such was the joy of fulfilment experienced by Yama when he found a disciple after his own heart in Nachiketa.

Even so, blessed was Gokhale who found such disciples as Gandhi, Shastri, Thakkar and others and blessed also were the disciples who adorned their master's discipleship and fulfilled as well as extended his mission !

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