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**SPECIAL LECTURE**

**GOKHALE AND SAS TRI**

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## GOKHALE AND SASTRI

### I

I am grateful to the Mysore University and Vice-Chancellor N. A. Nikam for this high privilege. May I recall that my Master, the late Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, spoke on the life and work of his Master, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, at this University in 1935? Now I have been asked to speak on the influence of my Master as well as his Master on Indian Political Thought and Life. While I am sensible of the honour, I confess, I am weighed down by the responsibility. May I seek your indulgence in an abundant measure as I endeavour, though inadequately, to dwell on these two great patriots?

At the outset, we may ask ourselves if it is worthwhile for us in 1961 to recall the life and work of these two, who lived and worked when conditions in India and elsewhere were different. Gokhale, who was born in 1866, within living

memory of the great upheaval called the Indian Mutiny, died forty-five years ago, in 1915, when another and even greater upheaval, the First World War, was on, and Britain was fighting with her back to the wall. Sastri, who was born three years after Gokhale, in 1869, passed away nearly fifteen years ago, in 1946, soon after British Victory in the Second World War and before India attained Independence. Their problems were different from ours; their task was to work for self-government for India, and ours is to use it for good government. Have their ends and means any continuing interest, apart from the historical? Have they any lessons for us in today's world of conflicts, turmoils and even bloody revolutions in and out of India?

Some of you, of the younger generation, may well wonder who Gokhale and Sastri were. As we get to know the unknown through the known, and as all of you have known of Mahatma Gandhi,

even if you have not known him personally, we may invoke his good offices to introduce to you Gokhale and Sastri. Gandhi, before he was acclaimed as “Mahatma Gandhi”, had acclaimed Gokhale as “Mahatma Gokhale” and enthroned him as his *Raja Guru* or Political Master and accorded to him the place of King among his heroes like Dadabhai Naoroji, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. To him Gokhale was all that he wanted in a political worker ; pure as crystal, gentle as a lamb, brave as a lion and chivalrous to a fault and the most perfect man in the political field.

Gandhi was but ten days younger than Sastri and looked upon him as a follow-disciple of Gokhale. “I was to have the honour of being Gokhale’s successor” (as the head of the Servants of India Society) said Gandhi, “but I found in Sastriar a very worthy usurper

to whom I made a willing surrender. . . . I had and have no gifts which Gokhale had and Sastriar has in luxurious abundance." Sastri was the one friend outside the circle of his followers, whom Gandhi consulted on critical occasions and valued his advice, though he often rejected it. In a letter, dated, November 24, 1932, written from the Yervada Prison, Poona, to Sastri, Gandhi said: "Your criticism soothes; your silence makes me nervous. Time only deepens my love for you; our differences appear to me superficial. Deep down I feel and touch the meeting ground that is precious." These references justify our spending some time learning something of these heroes.

I cannot speak from personal knowledge of Gokhale, though it was a speech of his which I heard as a student in Madras that decided me to join the Servants of India Society which he had founded in 1905. The circumstances of

the speech illumine an aspect of Gokhale which is worth recalling. He had come to Madras as a member of the Islington Commission on Public Services in India, appointed largely on his initiative. The work of the Commission had put a heavy strain on his health which was already poor due to chronic illness. Nevertheless, he graciously consented to address the students of Madras on the situation in India. The occasion was noteworthy in that an Englishman, Glyn Barlow, then Principal of the Pachaiappa's College, Madras, agreed to preside over Gokhale's<sup>(1)</sup> lecture. The day previous to the students' engagement, Gokhale received the disturbing news that his daughter was dying in Poona and was implored to return immediately, cancelling the speaking engagement of the morrow. He, however, decided to stay in Madras and to keep the engagement with the students. The audience was deeply moved and sympathised with him in his personal sorrow.

At the same time they admired his devotion to duty to the public, particularly to students. He spoke feelingly of the low and sad state of India at the time, pleaded earnestly for faster and more comprehensive progress and appealed for a handful of University graduates to sacrifice their normal ambitions of life and dedicate themselves to the secular service of India in the spirit in which religious work was generally undertaken and reverently seek the joy which came of spending oneself in the service of one's country. I registered a secret vow to respond, and from then on, my main concern was to fit myself to join the Servants of India Society and, if possible, serve under Gokhale. But by the time I took my degree, he has passed away. I saw Sastri, who had succeeded him, and sought admission. But he, with fatherly concern, considered me too young and too fresh from college to take such a step, and, as I had yet nothing to



give up to join the Society, advised me to make good somewhere and come back to him later. It was then that I sought service under the Mysore Government as Lecturer in Botany in the Central College, in 1915. Though I loved my students and my work and lived happily, the vow was beckoning me all the while. Ultimately, in 1921, when I had something to give up as one proof of my earnestness, Sastri admitted me to the Society, and I was a member of it for some thirty-seven years, till 1958. During that period I was on the staff, and for some years the Editor, of the *Servant of India*, started by Sastri in 1918, to propagate the the Gokhale school of politics. Denied the privilege of serving under Gokhale, I had the next best one, of serving under Sastri for about ten years in India, England, South Africa and East Africa and was bound to him, as he put it, "by the close tie of an affection that nothing can dim and many dear memories of

journeys, anxieties, ambitions, trials and enjoyments in common." These opportunities enabled me to know Sastri and through him, Gokhale, and voice their views on public questions, which differed from those of Tilak and Gandhi in some respects. Nevertheless, I realise my inadequacy to do due justice to their comprehensive work and influence in the short span of a lecture and shall, therefore, confine myself to some political aspects only.

Gokhale and Sastri had many things in common, besides their politics. They were both born poor, very poor indeed, and financed their education largely by merit scholarships and chose the teaching profession before taking to full-time public work. Both served in a Provincial Legislative Council and then in the Imperial Legislative Council and rendered outstanding service. Both played important roles in promoting political reforms. Gokhale, who visited England

several times on political missions, made a great contribution to the formulation of the Morley Reforms of 1909; in fact, Lord Morley was twitted by his political opponents in Britain with having copied the proposals of Gokhale! Sastri also visited England pretty frequently on political missions and played an equally vital part in the evolution of the Montagu Reforms ten years later, in 1919. Gokhale presided over the Indian National Congress in 1905 when he was only thirty-nine years old and holds the record as the youngest President of that body. Sastri presided over the National Liberal Federation, which he helped to found in 1918 when the Liberals seceded from the Congress to stand by the Montagu Reforms. Both took special interest in the promotion of education of all grades and, more particularly, of universal, compulsory and free primary education and the Indianization of the civil and military services and the

legislature in India as a prelude to Swaraj. Both sought to raise the status of the Indians overseas. Gokhale visited South Africa in 1912 and Sastri visited it on three occasions between 1926 and 1932. Both achieved unique personal success which, when viewed in the background of racial and, particularly anti-Indian, policies of South Africa, was remarkable to a degree. The veteran South African statesman, the Rt. Hon. Merriman, said to Gokhale: "Sir, when men like you visit our country, they purify the atmosphere." When Sastri left South Africa after being the Agent-General of the Government of India in that country for eighteen months, the late Rt. Hon. Gen. J. C. Smuts, his uncompromising political foe, acknowledged publicly, though ruefully, that Sastri was at the time the most popular and the most honoured individual in South Africa. The *Natal Advertiser* a British paper in anti-Indian Natal, spoke

of Sastri's "Reign in South Africa." Both Gokhale and Sastri were exposed to bitter and unfair attacks from their political opponents in India and displayed remarkable forbearance. Both had great reverence for their *Gurus*: Gokhale for Ranade and Sastri for Gokhale. Both were masters of the English language and used it to excellent effect. They were both noted for their fairness to their opponents, and as Gandhi said of Gokhale, chivalrous to a fault. Gandhi recalled how Gokhale spent hours and days cross-examining him to understand fully the point of view of the South African Whites. With pardonable exaggeration, it used to be said of Sastri that he could put his opponent's case better than his own! Both suffered long from chronic illness and did some of their best work under the shadow of death. Just two days before his death, Gokhale sat up in his sick-bed and wrote down, at the

request of Lord Willingdon, then Governor of Bombay, a private memorandum containing his recommendations for political reform which, if *volunteered* by the British Government, would satisfy political India for a good while. This document was published three years later and was known as Gokhale's Political Testament. Sastri also kept up his public work from his sick-bed and in 1946, a few weeks before his death, issued a very strong statement condemning Gen. Smuts' apologia for racial discrimination in South Africa. Both died with their boots on, as it were. The mere contemplation of their lives and their rise to great influence in the public life of India, and the Commonwealth, unassisted by adventitious aids of birth, wealth or power, is elevating and inspiring.

Lives of great men all remind us  
 We can make our lives sublime ;  
 And departing leave behind us  
 Footprints on the sands of time.

## II

The contemplation of their work is equally rewarding, though many of their problems are no longer with us. As stated already, theirs was to achieve Swaraj, and ours is to use it to good purpose. When they started on their public work, India was a dependency of Britain and was ruled from London. The subordinate legislatures in India were dominated by British officials. The civil and military services at the higher levels were the practical monopoly of Britishers. **S**elf-government called for the replacement of British officials by Indians elected non-officials in the legislatures and of Britishers by Indians in the services, for it was not to be expected that most Britishers would serve an Indian Government with the same enthusiasm and devotion as Indians would. Indianization was thus a prerequisite of self-government. During

the British regime, Gokhale, and after him Sastri, strove to accelerate Indianization without weakening the efficiency which characterised the British services at their best. Further, to sustain Swaraj it was necessary to give political education to the electorate and, as the minimum pre-condition of it, universalise free and compulsory primary education. Gokhale and Sastri made strenuous efforts to promote both these objectives. Both went to Britain again and again to promote India's political advance with the consent of the British Parliament and people. In India they took steps for the political and general education of the people. Most of the major objectives of Gokhale and Sastri have since been achieved. India has attained Swaraj; the legislatures and the services, civil and military, have been Indianised; the franchise has been extended. But free and compulsory education has not yet been universalised, though it is fifty



years since Gokhale made the first move, giving justification for the charge that Independent India is not keen, or sufficiently keen, on it.

Gokhale yielded to none in his political goal for India. He said: "I recognise no limits to my aspiration for our motherland. I want our people to be in our country what other people are in theirs. . . .I want India to take her proper place among the nations of the World." He and Sastri preferred to define precisely their aspiration as Dominion Status within the British Empire, to be achieved by constitutional means, and avoided the rather vague phrase Swaraj, to be achieved by all legitimate means. To Sastri Dominion Status meant independence plus security and the goodwill of Britain.

It is not so much the ultimate objectives but the steps to be taken to achieve them and the timing thereof that

distinguished Gokhale and Sastri from patriots like Tilak and Gandhi. They followed the political philosophy of Liberalism, Moderation and Constitutionalism, which earlier leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, to mention a few, had proclaimed, and they dissented from Radicalism, Extremism and Direct Action, which were favoured by Tilak and Gandhi at some time in their political career. The Tablets of the Liberalism were inscribed by Ranade as follows :

The spirit of Liberalism implies freedom from race and creed prejudices and steady devotion to all that seeks to do justice between man and man, giving to the rulers the loyalty that is due to the law they are bound to administer, but securing at the same time to the people the equality which is their right under the law. Moderation

implies the conditions of never vainly aspiring after the impossible or after remote ideals, but striving each day to take the next step in the order of natural growth by doing work that lies nearest to our hands in a spirit of compromise and fairness.

The appliation of this philosophy, as of others, is not capable of precise definition and must depend on concerned men and circumstances at any time and place. All that one may venture to note is that they judged right whose judgement prevailed in the end. Let us take, for instance, India's connection with the Britain and her membership of the British Empire, which has developed into the Commonwealth. In the Preamble to the Servants of India Society's Constitution, Gokhale inserted what Dadabhai Naoroji, Pherozeshah Mehta and Ranade had affirmed, namely, that the British connection was ordained, in the inscrut-

able dispensation of Providence, for India's good, and that self-government within the Empire was her goal. This philosophy has been severely criticised by certain Indian nationalists as savouring of slave mentality, as they considered the British connection to be a curse, and advocated that India should quit the Empire as soon as possible by any means. Some years after Gokhale's death, even the Servants of India Society felt the edge of the criticism so keenly that they deleted the statement from the Preamble! Perhaps such deletion was not necessary. In the first place, the Preamble is a fact of history, which is not susceptible to erasure. Secondly, Gokhale's reference was to "British Connection" and not to British rule, much less its anti-Indian aspect. None of the advocates of the British connection were blind to the evil aspect of British Imperialism in India. Dadabhai Naoroji himself referred to it as "Un-British Rule", which was his

strongest condemnation of it. He, however, recognised the existence of its better aspect, and said that if British rule was substituted for Un-British Rule, the result would be a "blessing to India and a glory to England, a result worthy of the foremost and most humane nation on the face of the earth." Gokhale too was not ignorant of the evil aspect of British rule. To the British rulers he said :

A kind of dwarfing or stunting of the Indian race is going on under the present system. We must live all the days of our life in an atmosphere of inferiority and the tallest among us must bend so that the exigencies of the situation may be satisfied. The upward impulse, if I may use such an expression, which every school-boy at Eton and Harrow may feel that he may one day be a Gladstone, a Nelson or a Wellington and which may draw

forth the best efforts of which he is capable, that is denied to us. The full height to which our manhood is capable of rising can never be reached by us under the present system. The moral elevation which self-governing people feel cannot be felt by us. Our administrative and military talents must gradually disappear, owing to sheer disuse, till at last our lot as hewers of wood and drawers of water in our own country is stereotyped.

To an Indian critic, he said :

Do you think that we are so devoid of self-respect and so base as to be happy at our country being under foreign yoke? I would have my country free today, if it were possible. But is it possible?

Sastri was no less conscious of the evil aspect of British rule and did not hesitate to condemn it on appropriate occasions. At the Viceregal banquet in

his honour in 1922, Sastri shocked the British Viceroy and the British officials by saying that he had never known India's faith in British rule fall so low as then. When the British Government yielded to the claim of racial superiority of the white settlers in Kenya in 1923, Sastri lashed out in white-heat indignation against the surrender of noble British ideals to ignoble Boer racialism. Incidentally, it may be recalled that this speech was made in Bangalore. Sorely and frequently as their faith in Britain was tried, they did not ignore the better aspect of British rule, nor the weaknesses of Indians and balanced the credits and the debits. Sadly Gokhale recalled that it was easy to create disorder in India ; it was her portion for centuries. British rule had brought to the distracted country peace and order, without which there could be no progress of any kind. He recalled that a succession of great British statesmen, who in their day

represented the highest thought and feeling in Britain, had declared that, in their opinion, Britain's greatest work in India was to associate Indians, slowly it may be but steadily, with the governance of their country and withdraw from a friendly and self-governing India. Notwithstanding occasional hesitations and retractions, that promise had been kept by the enactment of a series of reforms, each of which gave more power to Indians until the Indian Independence Act of 1947 completed the process. Often the pace of progress was too slow and halting even for Gokhale and Sastri, but it was steady, justifying their hope that the good effects of British rule would survive and its evils, which were temporary, would vanish when the promise of self-government was fulfilled and India attained the status equal to that of the other Dominions in the British Empire. In the meanwhile, it was not wise to throw away the baby with the bath-water.



They were confident that India's highest political ambition was possible within the British Empire and pleaded that India should value and cherish her membership of it. The British Empire was a smaller and more cohesive League of Nations or United Nations, and it would be sheer vandalism to break away from it. It was best to remain in it and seek equality not only with the Dominions but also with Britain herself.

This attitude of Gokhale and Sastri was opposed by some Indian nationalists who saw more of the evil than the good in British rule and the British connection. At the beginning of this century, Tilak was very anti-British and wished to eliminate British rule in India by all means open to Indians. He had suffered much at the hands of the British rulers ; he was accused of sedition, sentenced to six long years of imprisonment and transportation to Mandalay in Burma.

Both for public and personal reasons, Tilak had justification to hate British rule and the British connection. When the first World war was on and Britain was under great strain to defend herself, some Indian extremists thought that Britain's difficulty was India's opportunity to snatch Swaraj from her unyielding grip. Surprisingly enough, Tilak took a very unexpected line in his Manifesto of the Congress Democratic Party in 1920, just about three months before his death, at the age of sixty-four. Mellowed with age and experience, he took a more balanced view of British rule and the British connection and said :

The Party believes in the integration or Federation of India in the British Commonwealth for the advancement of humanity and the brotherhood of mankind, but demands autonomy for India and equal status as a sister-state with every other partner in the British Commonwealth.

He went on to say that Home Rule for India did not mean snapping the connection between England and India ; it did not mean disclaiming the suzerain power of the King-Emperor. On the contrary, it affirmed and strengthened both. " You must not forget", he adjured, " that it is the connection with England and the education she gave that have given rise to the ambitions that fill your hearts." He affirmed : " We want the English people, English institutions, English liberty and Empire." All that he wanted was that the internal administration of India should be under Indian control. Referring specifically to the value of British rule, he said :

It has been well said that British rule is conferring inestimable benefit, not only in its civilised methods of administration, but also by bringing together the different nationalities and races of India, so that a United Nation may grow together out of it in course

of time. I do not believe that if we had any other ruler, except the liberty-loving British, they could have conceived and assisted us in developing such a national ideal. Every one, who has the interests of India at heart, is fully alive to this and similar advantages of British rule.

The Liberal statesman, Gokhale, could not have improved on this estimate of British rule and the British connection of the extremist statesman, Tilak. The difference was that Gokhale held it from the beginning and Tilak reached it at the end of his political career.

The Montagu Constitution of 1919, which had proclaimed that Responsible Government of the British type was the goal of British policy in India and introduced the first step towards it, provided for a review of progress at the end of every ten years before the next step was taken. Sastri, who welcomed the Montagu Constitution for its pro-

mise, disapproved of the periodical examinations and pressed that the next step should be the final one, and taken earlier than the first ten years. But the British Rulers, who were antagonised by the Non-Cooperation of the Indian National Congress, were slow to respond.

Understandingly exasperated by the political stagnation and repression, the Congress, urged by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, gave an ultimatum to Britain that India would accept Dominion Status if offered before the 31st December 1929, failing which, she would declare for Independence. Seventeen years afterwards, in 1947, Britain passed the Indian Independence Act conferring Dominion Status on India and gave her the option to stay in the Commonwealth or withdraw from it. As Prime Minister of India, Nehru chose that India should stay in the Commonwealth as a full member and has been championing it

with greater zeal than perhaps Gokhale and Sastri did. Having declared India a Republic, he acknowledged the Sovereign of Britain as the Head of the Commonwealth, overlooking the implication that the Head of an organization is superior in status to a member of it, and as such, the British Sovereign, as the Head of the Commonwealth, ranks higher than the President of India !

As stated already, Sastri aimed at Dominion Status for India, while the Indian National Congress aimed at Independence after 1929. If Dominion Status meant less freedom than Independence, it is surprising that the Congress should be content with less freedom before a given date and declare for more freedom only after it, for the content of freedom does not depend on a date. The difference meant within or without the Empire, and we have already seen that Independent India chose to be within the Commonwealth. But did Nehru's Inde-

pendence mean more than Sastri's Dominion in status and function? The Indian Independence Act was passed by the British Parliament, the only sovereign legislature in the Commonwealth. Constitutionally speaking, it is competent to repeal it, though politically it is unthinkable. The Act created two Dominions, of which India was one, and not independent States like Britain or America. The Indian Constituent Assembly was not set up by India after achieving independence, as America did, but by the British before independence, and Britain gave previous sanction to the Constitution to be drafted by the Assembly. If the British Sovereign has no authority in India since independence, it has none in any of the Dominions either. They are all, including India, equally Dominions constitutionally and independent politically. The use of the word "Independence" in the Indian Independence Act was a diplomatic

concession to the sentiment of India prevailing in 1947. After rejecting Dominion Status, Nehru has come back to it, as advocated by Gokhale and Sastri.

'Gokhale and Sastri stood uncompromisingly for constitutional agitation, as against fasts, hartals and direct action, violent or non-violent, to achieve political ends. By constitutional they meant using the existing constitution to improve it. When Gokhale was asked if history knew of any country which attained her freedom by constitutional means, he replied that the last chapter of history had not yet been written and that it might be given to India and Britain to write a new chapter of a subject country achieving freedom through constitutional action. Such a chapter was written in 1947; India won freedom through constitutional means.

Even as Gokhale disapproved of direct action favoured by Tilak, Sastri



opposed non-cooperation promoted by Gandhi. Sastri was not impressed by Gandhi's promise of Swaraj in a year if non-cooperation was non-violent and was adopted on a mass scale, for he knew that the plan was impossible of realisation, even under the inspiring leadership of the Mahatma and that it would leave a legacy which the Swaraj Government of India would bitterly regret. Direct action, to be successful, had to be adopted on a national scale and over a long period. It entailed immense sacrifices and sufferings and called for great self-restraint on the part of the participants. A handful of high-minded and highly disciplined individuals, like the Mahatma, might be trusted to undertake civil disobedience and keep it non-violent and leave no undesirable after-effects, but not large masses of ignorant and ill-trained innocents. Satyagraha at its highest level might bring about some change of heart in sensitive opponents like, say, Ramsay

Macdonald and the British Labour Party, but not insensitive ones like Winston Churchill and the British Tories. It is significant that even the Mahatma did not undertake a fast unto death at the doorstep of Mohammed Ali Jinnah of the Muslim League to induce a change of heart in him and was content to negotiate, plead and appeal and submit to defeat. It is also significant that the Congress today has not advocated non-violent non-cooperation, including fasts unto death, to induce Pakistan and China to vacate their aggressions in Kashmir and on India's northern frontier. Non-cooperation, thought Sastri, would only antagonise the British rulers and give them excuse to indulge in repression and demoralise the people. It was bound to undermine respect for law among the masses of the people, all of whom did not have the same sense of responsibility and discrimination as the Mahatma had and were likely to take the law into their

own hands whenever they liked and seek cover under the Mahatma's Gospel, and bedevil the successor Indian Government for a long, long time. It would hurt India more than Britain and it would not achieve its objective of Swaraj. Statesmen should shrink from a policy which would inflict fruitless sufferings on the people, alienate the rulers and fail of its purpose and leave a bad legacy. Political progress with the consent of the rulers involved no such evil effects then or after, and progress might not be slower. Sastri anticipated in 1923 that by persevering in constitutional agitation, India would achieve self-government within twenty-five years, or about 1948. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding Congress non-cooperation, India achieved self-government only in 1947.

It is worthwhile to recall that Tilak, who hoped to wrest Swaraj in 1902 by extra-constitutional action, declined to join the similar movement started by

Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. But the Mahatma persisted in it. And it is now very commonly held that India won Swaraj through Satyagraha. As Prof. R. C. Mazumdar pointed out in his Birla Endowment Lecture on Indian History in Bombay on December 16, 1960, this claim is open to serious doubt. As a general rule, historical events have multiple causes, though each historian may pick on one as the chief cause. Again, in history, there are no control experiments, nor can an event be repeated under controlled conditions to determine the exact cause of an event. Most history is mostly fiction woven round some historical facts. Satyagraha in India has had to be suspended on several occasions by its authors when not suppressed by the British rulers. Its best chance was in 1942 when the British *prestige and power* in India were at their lowest, with Japan battering at the door of India, having overrun Malaya and

Burma. It was then that the Congress, under the Mahatma's leadership, attempted its supreme Satyagraha blitz when it passed the "Quit India" Resolution and, as admitted by the late Moulana Abul Kalam Azad, even condoned, and connived at, resort to violence. Far from overthrowing the British, non-cooperation itself was overthrown. It was only when Britain had won the Second World War and was pretty safe in the saddle that she offered Swaraj to India. Among the several factors which contributed to this end was the fact, for which neither India nor Satyagraha was responsible, that the Labour Party, which was deeply committed to self-government for India, came to power in Britain, and the Rt. Hon. Clement Atlee became the Prime Minister. When the "Quit India" movement failed, Sastri, who sadly anticipated it, suffered great humiliation and began his letter to Mahatma Gandhi with these words: "I pen these words

in anguish." In the course of it he said :  
 " your last movement has not borne the  
 fruit that you wished. Admit what  
 everybody sees. No hesitation need be  
 felt to recognise facts. You yield, no  
 doubt. But you yield to Fate and not  
 to man. Stoop to conquer."

While direct action, both violent and non-violent, did not by itself win Swaraj, it left a legacy which the Swaraj Government has been regretting. One person's fast unto death forced the hands of Government to sanction the Andhra State ; another fast or threat of fast may bring about the Punjabi-Suba. Violence promoted the formation of Maharashtra and Gujarat and Nagaland. After Gandhi's ministrations of non-violence for quarter of a century, there are more exhibitions of violence in India after Swaraj than before, and against the Swaraj Government itself, which has been obliged to discourage direct action as sincerely as Gokhale and Sastri did

in their time. Nevertheless, it has come to co-exist as a tempting alternative to constitutional action.

Keen as Gokhale and Sastri were for self-government as early as possible, they realised that much had to be done to fit India for the responsibility. Taking a balanced view, Gokhale recognised with satisfaction that the feeling that we were Indians first and Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc., afterwards was steadily growing among the educated Indians who formed the brain of the community. But that only meant that the jungle had been cleared and the foundations laid. The great work of the superstructure yet remained to be taken in hand by a band of patriots with a devotion proportionate to the magnitude of the task. He frankly, if sadly, admitted that much had yet to be done to build up a higher type of character and capacity than was generally available at the time, and he recognised that advance could only be slow.

Gokhale and Sastri had to take into account not only the natural reluctance of the British vested interests in India but also of the divisions based on caste, religion and language among the Indian people. They had to labour on two fronts, as it were. Gokhale pleaded that, pending the availability of sufficient number of Indians of the requisite quality, Britishers in India should work like Indians in spirit, though foreign in race. The same plea was made by Mr. Morarji Desai, the present Finance Minister, in his speech to the Associated Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta on December 19, 1960, when he appealed to the foreign industrialists to develop Indian National outlook. If the co-operation of foreign men and money are necessary and acceptable to India after Independence, they were not less necessary before.

Whatever be the grievances of Indians, Gokhale felt that the prestige of



Government, as Government, should not be undermined by partisan attacks. He would not, if he could, inflict a defeat on the Government even in the sedate and safe atmosphere of the legislature, lest its prestige should suffer. He would advise and admonish, but not denounce. Neither he nor Sastri would characterise the Government of India as "Satanic." Partisan criticism is inevitable under the party system in a democracy, and it is more so in a parliamentary than in a presidential one.

Gokhale preferred "responsive" to "responsible" Government for India in his Political Testament of 1915. Though familiar with the British Parliamentary system, he did not advocate its adoption in India. On the other hand, he proposed an irremovable executive both at the centre and in the provinces responsive to the legislature.

Sastri had a large share in drafting the Congress-League Scheme on 1915-16.

It also proposed an irremovable executive, which would be "responsive" but not "responsible" to the legislature and which could veto a proposal of that legislature but once, but was bound to respect it if it was passed again after an interval of one year. The Executive, provincial and central, was to consist of Indians and Britishers in equal numbers, and the Indians were to be elected by the elected members of the legislature. The powers of the Central Government were to be limited to general supervision of provincial Governments, except in emergencies. In imperial and international bodies, India was to have the same status as the Dominions. Though Sastri also was familiar with the British Parliamentary system of responsible Government, he too did not advocate it for India. It was Britain, through Montagu, that announced in 1917, when the First World War was still on, that responsible government was the goal of

British policy in India, to be reached by stages to be determined by the British. While welcoming it, Sastri, as well as the Congress, preferred the Congress-League Scheme of "responsive" to "responsible" Government. Responsible Government of the British Parliamentary type was the gift of Britain and not the demand of India.

Sastri not was enamoured of the British Parliamentary system, with its political parties, with its ins and outs, Government and Opposition, engaged in continuous "Cold War." He was of the view that the system worked only if there were two and only two large and well-defined parties. Even in Britain it had seen its best days and was largely out-moded and continued only because of tradition and inertia. The National Party of Britain, formed during the First World War, had said :

For years past the old party system has been nothing better than organised

mockery of the true spirit of the nation. If we are to win victory in the War and after, we must free ourselves somehow from the clutches of this octopus. The future of the Commonwealth depends on the honesty and capacity of our public men. Politics is a matter of life and death. Should it continue to be played as a game of party interests and personal ambitions, served by two machines which are kept in funds by the sale of honours, the end can only be disaster.

Sastri observed :

By universal consent, a system of ins and outs, unless it is evolved naturally out of long practice of representative institutions, is attended with so many risks that, at least in its inception, limitations may be considered necessary as to its scope.

He, therefore, preferred the examples of America and Switzerland to those of

Britain and France. His first preference was the Swiss system, which Prof. Dicey described as “a Board of Directors appointed to manage the concern of the Federation in accordance with the wishes of the Federal Assembly.” Prof. R. C. Ghose of the Calcutta University, in his book, *The Government of the Swiss Republic*, said :

“The most interesting feature about the Swiss party system in the absence of strongly centralised parties on the American or British model.”

He added that the Swiss Government was remarkably free from bitter party rivalry or monopoly of power, gave no opportunity or temptation to a political party to distribute patronage or spoils to keep itself in power and offered little scope for professionalism and demagoguery in politics, and the administration was highly business-like and efficient. Christopher Hughes, in his book, *The*

*Federal Constitution of Switzerland*, said that the Swiss Confederation had never known the two-party system where Government alternated with the Opposition, and was noted for its stability, cleanliness, swiftness and moderation. Hans Huber, Judge of the Swiss Federal Supreme Court, said that if a political party obtained an absolute majority, as a rule it soon handed over a few seats to one or more minority parties, and that Switzerland had become a country of coalitions. In fact, Article 91 of the Swiss Constitution prescribed that a member of the Legislature should vote "without instruction", which meant according to his conscience and not according to the dictates of his party majority. Indeed, that is the correct democratic procedure even in a parliamentary system according to the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill. He said that the first duty of a member of Parliament was to act according to his faithful and

disinterested judgment. But this healthy democratic procedure is well-nigh impossible under the party system, particularly in Parliamentary Democracy, where the Government is under continuous threat of being unseated and has to adopt all manner of means, fair or foul, to retain office. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that the party system, which is extra-constitutional and anti-democratic, has dominated democratic governments. Democracy enjoins: all for the nation and none for a party, but the party system insists; each for his party and none for the nation.

It is significant that Mr. M. Ananthasayanam Iyengar, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, suggested in Bangalore on 31st December 1960, that the Prime Minister as well as Chief Ministers should be elected by the whole legislature, and should normally retain office during the term of the legislature, with a view to giving stability to the Ministry and

discourage the evils of the party system. His proposal recalls in some respects those of Gokhale and Sastri. It was spot-lighted by President Rajendra Prasad in his recent request to the Indian Law Institute to ascertain the powers of the President of India in relation to the Prime Minister as the leader of the Council of Ministers. The Indian Constitution said that the executive authority of the Indian Union shall be vested in the President, to be exercised by him, either directly or through officers subordinate to him, in accordance with the Constitution, and that he shall appoint a Council of Minister, with the Prime Minister at the head, to aid and advise him but that it shall be responsible to Parliament. It ignored the fact that the Ministers cannot be responsible to the President as well as to Parliament. Dr. Rajendra Prasad himself, as the President of the Indian Constituent Assembly, said that in practice the convention, that the



President shall act only on the advice of the Prime Minister in all matters, should prevail over the Constitution that the Prime Minister shall only aid and advise the President! In other words, the Ministers would be responsible to Parliament and not to the President, who may aid and advice them. His present poser indicates that he has come to share Sastri's preference for responsive, as against responsible, government.

Sastri's action in accepting Montagu's offer of responsible government of the British type, notwithstanding his misgivings, was an instance of his Liberal philosophy of honourable compromise and grasping the possible without hankering after what at the moment was impossible. He however hoped that free India would be free to adopt the Swiss Constitution. Like the Italian statesman, Cavour, both Gokhale and Sastri were "masters of the possible" if it was in line with the desirable.

Another example of preferring the attainable to the unattainable at the time was the compromises in South Africa. For long Indian leaders held to the belief, warranted by Queen Victoria's Proclamation, that there was but one citizenship in the British Empire, and that all British subjects, irrespective of race, were free to migrate to any part of it for settlement. They regretted, therefore, the restrictions imposed on Indians migrating to and settling in the Dominions and hoped for their elimination. But when Gokhale and Sastri acquiesced in such restrictions, though reluctantly, they were criticised in India for having abjectly surrendered a valuable right of Indians. But it must be remembered that Mahatma Gandhi, whose devotion to the rights and privileges of Indians was beyond doubt, had also acquiesced in the racial restrictions on Indian immigration to and settlement in South Africa. It was because he too, like Gokhale and Sastri,

realised that at the time racial equality in immigration and settlement in the Empire was unattainable, however desirable. Even Independent India has not yet been able to secure it, and the status of Indians in South Africa is even worse now than before. But this unfortunate result has not been due to cowardly subservience of the present Indian leadership to racialism. The only, though passing, occasion when the South African Government was persuaded to profess to uplift the permanent Indian population in that country was when the Cape Town Agreement was signed, in negotiating which Sastri played the most important part, and when he was Agent-General of the Government of India in South Africa. If today India has not yet been able to secure the vacation of aggression in Kashmir and Ladak or restitution of Goa, it is not due to slave mentality on the part of the Indian leaders, but because of the lack of

power to enforce their will, combined with the hope of peaceful settlement.

Summarising the political ends and means of Gokhale and Sastri, it may be said that India attained Dominion Status by constitutional means, by an Act of the British Parliament, and Gokhale's hope that Britain and India would write a new chapter in history of a subject country achieving freedom by constitutional agitation has been realised. It had a kind of chain reaction in that Ghana and other countries have also won freedom through constitutional action. The apprehension of Gokhale and Sastri that even temporary direct action, far from achieving freedom by itself, would leave a legacy which would embarrass free India has also come true.

Their views for the Constitution of India are as valid today as when they made them. It is true that the functioning of any Constitution depends on the

character and competence of its operators. While no structure can guarantee them, a good structure can facilitate desirable, and discourage undesirable, functioning. Insofar as the structure of the Constitution can help in securing good and democratic Government, the Swiss Constitution has been generally acclaimed as the best and the most efficient in the world. As such, it is good for all countries, but more so for India, as Sastri predicated. Insofar as the present Indian Constitution is made to approximate to the Swiss one, it will promote stability, honesty and efficiency and curb the evils of the party system, with its partisan loyalties and spoils. The unity of India was built up, if without design, by the British by the unitary Constitution, with delegation of powers to subordinate authorities, like provinces and districts, and by the use of the English language for higher education and administration and by the institution

**of the all-India Services. The best way to retain the Unity of India and even strengthen it today is to re-establish unequivocally the unitary Constitution, the all-India Services and the English language in the position they held during the British regime.**

### III

Greater than the achievement of Gokhale and Sastri were their personalities. Gokhale crystallised his political philosophy in the motto: 'Public life must be spiritualised.' He meant by it that service for the secular progress of India should be undertaken in the spirit in which religious work was undertaken, namely: utter devotion to the cause; self-effacement and no thought of reward.

The nobility of his character was revealed in the apology incident. While he was in England about 1897, he had reports from his personal friends in Poona that the British soldiers who were engaged in plague relief operations had committed some abominable excesses and gave publicity to them. On his return to India, he was challenged to prove them, but his informants would not stand by him on the ground that they had not authorised him to publish their reports.

Unable to prove the allegations, Gokhale decided to offer an unconditional apology to the Government as well as the British soldiers. While he himself and his more thoughtful friends were sure that he had done what duty and honour required, his political enemies in India accused him of having humiliated India and severely castigated him. Whereupon he said that trials and tribulations, accepted in the right spirit, only chastened and elevated, and that there was sublimity and moral elevation in undeserved suffering which nothing could equal and was almost its reward. Public duties, undertaken at the bidding of no one, were not to be given up at the bidding of any one. One was glad of approbation, but that was not the highest purpose, or nearly the highest. If it came, well; if not, well also, though not so well. No wonder that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu characterised Gokhale as the "greatest saint and soldier of national righteousness."



It is no small tribute to his personality that he should be acclaimed as "Mahatma" by Mahatma Gandhi; and it is no small tribute to the personality of Sastri that his sojourn in South Africa was described by a British paper in anti-Indian Natal as the "brilliant reign of Sastri." May the examples of Gokhale and Sastri inspire India now and ever ?

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