

GOKHALEANA

No. 8

May 9, 1972



G. K. GOKHALE in London, 1897

Edited by :

S. R. VENKATARAMAN,
SERVANTS OF INDIA SOCIETY, MADRAS-14.

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**Gokhale's 106th Birthday
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FOREWORD

The late Mr. K. Natarajan, the distinguished Editor of *Indian Social Reformer*, Bombay, was equally a well-known publicist, contemporary and friend of Gokhale, Gandhi and other leaders, of the then presidencies of Bombay and Madras.

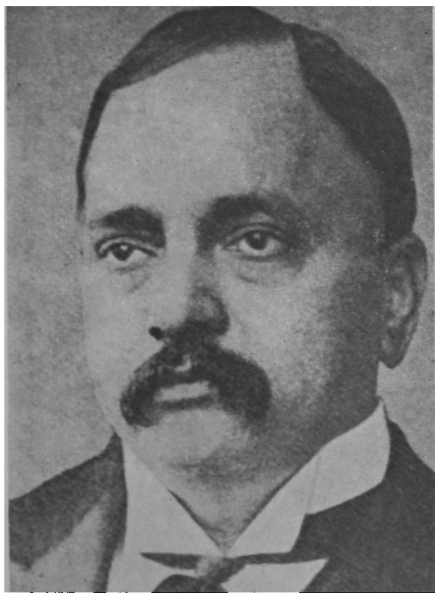
His speech on Gokhale included in this issue of *Gokhaleana* is not only an intimate picture of Gokhale's life and times but is also a sympathetic and an objective assessment of Gokhale, the Man and his Mission.

This speech was delivered on the 19th February 1930, by Mr. Natarajan on the 15th Anniversary of Gokhale's death, at the Deccan Sabha, Poona.

Madras-14.

May 5, 1972

S. R. VENKATARAMAN



Gokhale in London — 1897

GOKHALE — THE MAN AND HIS WORK

by

K. NATARAJAN

Of all professions journalism is at once the most fascinating and the most dreary. It is fascinating because of the wide variety of interests it constantly presents and because, if one happens to have some great cause at heart, it gives him the opportunity of striking a blow for it at the right time. It is dreary because, unlike the other professions such as law and medicine where the results of one's efforts are known sooner or later, the journalist may never know what the results of his efforts are. Sometimes, however, the journalist also has the gratification of knowing that what he wrote has produced some effect. There is no moment in his life so exhilarating as when he is told by some distant and unknown reader that his writing stirred in him some abiding thought or emotion. This experience happened to me with Gokhale. The *Indian Social Reformer*, published in its issue of the 16th January 1898 a letter from Gokhale, dated 7th January 1898, which concluded as follows:—

“I have no doubt about the ultimate verdict on my conduct. The day will come when it will be generally recognized by my countrymen that this

most unfortunate incident deserves to be thought of, as far as I am concerned, in sorrow, not in anger, and that under most trying circumstances I had taken the only course which was consistent with duty and honour. Meanwhile, I am content to wait."

The reference, of course, was to the unhappy incident which led Gokhale to withdraw and apologise for certain statements he had made with regard to the plague operations in Poona when he was in England giving evidence before the Welby Commission on Indian expenditure. The statements related to the conduct of British soldiers who were employed to evacuate compulsorily the inmates of infected houses in Poona. The persons who supplied Gokhale with the information, with the exception of Pandita Ramabai, refused to come forward to substantiate their allegations and he had no alternative in the circumstances except to withdraw and apologise for those allegations which had created a storm of indignation in England and in India. Gokhale's letter was evidently a long one as in the editorial comment I find it stated that it had to be cut short to bring it within the limits of the space available in the *Reformer*. In the course of that comment which was a lengthy one extending to three paragraphs, I wrote:—

"That Mr. Gokhale was made to feel that an explanation was at all required from him for his conduct which, every honourable and honest man must admit, was the only honourable and honest

course open to him, is another serious reflection on the character of those who took part or sympathised with the ill-mannered and silly demonstration with which, it is said, a proposal to include Mr. Gokhale among the speakers in the last Congress at Amraoti was met."

It was two years after this that I met Gokhale in Bombay for the first time. He spoke to me with warm feeling of this comment as a thing that he would never forget, of the *Reformer* having been the only journal which stood by him in his "dark hour of trial."

GOKHALE'S RELIGIOUS VIEWS

In December 1899, I met Gokhale at the Lahore Congress over which Sir Narayan Chandavarkar presided. He was still brooding over the harsh treatment which he had received at the hands of his fellow-countrymen and sat with me in the back-benches and told me that he would not speak even if he was invited as they had treated him so shabbily. The position continued to remain so strained particularly with his fellow-citizens of Poona that in 1902 Gokhale had made up his mind to shift his home to Bombay and was only induced to alter his plans at the last moment by the pressure of friends who wished him to become the first non-official president of the Poona Municipality. This experience would seem to have turned Gokhale's thoughts in a most important direction. The professors of the Ferguson College

had the reputation of being agnostics and Gokhale being one of them shared in it and Sir Valentine Chirol in his book *Indian Unrest* has thought fit to note it. I do not know whether the professors of that College still profess that creed. If they do so they must be really very tenacious of their views as agnosticism has disappeared from the rest of the world. Anyhow Gokhale's religious views were undergoing change. I find that in a letter dated 26th July 1902, Gokhale wrote :

“I wanted to write and tell you sometime ago that I read your article on Vivekananda with great pleasure. During my stay in Calcutta, I came to understand his aims and aspirations much better than before and you exactly expressed my feelings in your article.”

Some years later when I happened to be in Calcutta Gokhale who was also there attending the Imperial Legislative Council, took me into his study one day where I found on his table a glass paper weight with an inscription in bold letters “God is Love.” I could not help making some remark expressive of my surprise whereupon Gokhale quietly said that was what he had come to believe. A few days after Gokhale's death, meeting Sir Ramkrishna Bhandarkar at the Bombay University, I mentioned this incident to him. Sir Ramkrishna observed that he had heard from Mr. Justice Ranade that Gokhale's religious views were undergoing change and that a public declaration might be shortly expected. “But,” he added regretfully, “that declaration never came.”

An amusing incident happened during this time at Calcutta. Mr. V. P. Madhava Rao who had served with distinction as Dewan of Travancore, Mysore and Baroda, had a few months before retired from the last-named state and was looking out for some sphere of public usefulness in which he could utilise his vast administrative experience to the benefit of the country. The idea of joining the Servants of India Society had occurred to him and he had asked me to sound Gokhale about it. Gokhale seemed rather disinclined as Mr. Madhava Rao, he thought, was much too big a man to be fitted into the scheme of his Society which was then in its infancy. However, he made an appointment to call on the Dewan at Sir Vithalda's house. Gokhale came at about 2 p.m. and a servant said that the Dewan was having his seista when Gokhale turned to me and said seriously that it was against the rules of the Society to sleep in the daytime. The Dewan came in a few minutes and I told him what Gokhale had said when Madhava Rao laughed and said that he was not sleeping but only lying down with his eyes closed and his servant thought he was asleep.

INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN MR. GANDHI AND
MR. HARDINGE

The last personal experience which I might mention here was very shortly before Gokhale's death. Gokhale had asked me when he returned from South Africa to correspond with Mr. Gandhi on his behalf in connection with the fund which

he with the assistance of Mr. Jehangir Petit was collecting and of which the late Sir Hormasji Wadia was the chairman. One day, Sir Hormasji and I received a telegram from Gokhale to see him in Poona at once as he had had the previous day the first of the heart attacks to which he succumbed shortly after. We reached the Society's Headquarters at about noon and were immediately admitted to Gokhale's room where he was lying on a couch evidently exhausted. Gokhale at once sat up and insisted on himself reading to us, in spite of our protest, a large batch of telegrams and cables which had passed during the two or three days previous between Lord Hardinge who was then on a visit to Lucknow and Gokhale on the one hand and on the other between Mr. Gokhale and Mr. Gandhi in South Africa. Mr. Gandhi had refused to appear before the Commission and Lord Hardinge who had taken up a strong attitude in support of the Indian cause, was insistent that the Indians should appear before the Commission. The Viceroy's tone was unusually strong and, I think, he said he would wash his hands clean of the matter if Mr. Gandhi persisted in his attitude. Gokhale was evidently much distressed. We were with him for about four hours and we could see that the difficulty of mediating between these two personages was severely straining his fast failing health. That was the last I saw of Gokhale.

These are some of the incidents serious and trivial which come to mind when I think of Gokhale and which seem to me to give a true

picture of the man as he appeared to one who had the privilege of his friendship till his death. A much more intimate view was presented to you by Sir Lalubhai Samaldas in laying the foundation stone of the Gokhale Hall which is rising near by, five years ago. I have read Sir Lalubhai's speech and I think that his impressions of Gokhale the Man coincide surprisingly with my own.

GOKHALE AND BRITISH OFFICIALS

I may now give you one or two illustrations of the impression which Gokhale made on high English officials with whom he was thrown in contact. The first one is from Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson's *Letters to Nobody*. Sir Guy was Finance Member of the Government of India, 1908-1913, having been specially sent out from England. Writing of his first Budget experience in the Imperial Legislative Council he makes a striking reference to Gokhale, which perhaps many have not seen. It is as follows :—

“It was a wonderful change for the Indian members of the Legislative Council to upset an inexperienced Minister, and I anticipated a trying time of it in debate. The one man I frankly feared was Gokhale, the Gladstone of India.

Accordingly I endeavoured to find out what Gokhale's line of attack would be. All and everyone told me that the attempt would be futile, and that any apparent frankness on Gokhale's part would only be a cloak to his real intentions. So I left him severely alone.

Imagine my surprise at receiving on the eve of the debate a letter from Gokhale, whom I did not even know, to the effect that as he had good reason to believe that I meant to do my utmost for the good of India, he had no desire to embarrass me, and that therefore he sent me the notes of the speech he proposed to make so that I should not be taken unawares.

I do not believe that such a generous attitude has ever been assumed by the Leader of the opposition in any other country in the world."

Here is another from Lord Ronaldshay's *Life of Curzon* which testifies to the same innate chivalry of Gokhale:—

"As President of the National Congress at Benares in 1905, Mr. G. K. Gokhale indulged in 'a passionate and acrid onslaught' on Lord Curzon and all his works. But six months later when Lord Curzon himself lay stricken with the pain of a great affliction, Mr. Gokhale wrote to him that the heart of all India would go out to him in profound and reverent sorrow. And he spoke in touching terms of the inevitable loneliness of 'such rare spirits as your Lordship who live for lofty ends and make a religion of all their work'."

Most of us know Lord Morley's estimate of Gokhale, "a Mahratta Brahmin from Bombay immensely interesting." "He has a politician's head; appreciates executive responsibility; has made no secret of his ultimate hope and design—India to be on the footing of a self-governing colony. I equally made no secret of my conviction,

that for many a day to come—long beyond the short span of time that may be left to us—this was a mere dream.” In reading Lord Morley’s references to Gokhale I made a surprising discovery. Lord Minto while he was in India as Viceroy publicly referred to Gokhale in such terms as have seldom been employed by Viceroys about Indian public men. But in private he was writing to Lord Morley in a different strain. “I rather smile at your warning,” writes Lord Morley to Lord Minto, “not to take Gokhale and his letters to third persons too seriously or too literally.” Lord Morley went on to say that having dealt with Parnell he knew how to deal with Gokhale and “others of the political breed.” I have heard before in a vague way of high English officials making fun in private of Indians whom they profusely honour in public but this dual attitude of a Viceroy who was known best before he came to India as a typical British sportsman came upon me, as no doubt it will come upon you, with a shock. Indians too will do well to take Lord Minto’s warning and not take the compliments of British Governors and Viceroys too seriously or too literally. But all this is past history though not without its implications for the present or the future.

GOKHALE’S POLITICAL CREED

I now come to Gokhale’s views on public questions which are naturally of more immediate practical interest to us. Political and public life

before Gokhale died was materially different from what they have since come to be. But the germs of nearly all the important subsequent developments had already begun to sprout and we are fortunate in having Gokhale's considered and almost prophetic pronouncements on nearly all of them. The first and most prominent though not necessarily the most serious question debated at the present day relates to the political goal of India — whether it should be Independence or Dominion Status. On that Gokhale has recorded his deliberate opinion in unmistakable terms. Speaking in Allahabad in February 1907 Gokhale said, and the words are printed on the front page of Mr. Natesan's collection of Gokhale's speeches :

“I recognize no limits to my aspirations for our motherland. I want our people to be in their own country what other people are in theirs. I want our men and women, without distinction of caste or creed, to have opportunities to grow to the full height of their stature, unhampered by cramping and unnatural restrictions. I want India to take her proper place among the great nations of the world, politically, industrially, in religion, in literature, in science and in arts. I want all this and feel at the same time that the whole of this aspiration can, in its essence and its reality, be realized within this Empire.”

In some of Gokhale's later speeches he has closely argued out this question and I would specially refer you to the speech in which this passage occurs on “the Work before Us” delivered

at a public meeting in Allahabad at which it is interesting to note the chair was taken by Pandit Motilal Nehru. I wish to stress this matter because I feel that the case for Dominion Status is not being presented to our young men and women in its fullest and truest form. It is too often represented as a matter of practical though unpleasant necessity and even as a temporary makeshift. The late Mr. C. R. Das who was far above the level of the carpet bag politician perceived the true spiritual superiority of the ideal of working out our destiny within the British Commonwealth of Nations. Gokhale too I think perceived it and I feel sure that if properly presented it will appeal to young minds by its power of idealism and attraction of disinterested service.

THE COMMUNAL QUESTION

On the question of Hindu-Mahommedan relations Gokhale has likewise left behind for our guidance his method of solution. Gokhale visualised the problem, as it should be done, as relating not only to the Mahommedans but to all important minority communities. There is a speech which he made at this very Deccan Sabha in Marathi in July 1909 on the Hindu-Mahommedan question and which is of great current importance. It is not necessary to make a long quotation here as Mr. Natesan's collection is easily available to the public. Gokhale was not against special separate electorates. He said, on the other hand that he

had all along been in favour of special separate electorates for important minorities but he wanted such electorates to provide not the whole of the representation to which the communities were entitled but only so much of it as was necessary to redress the deficiencies and inequalities of general elections ; and he wanted the same treatment to be extended to other important minorities than Mahommedans where necessary. Gokhale mentioned in this speech that the Government of India's original proposals had been very much on these lines. This is confirmed by John Buchan in his *Lord Minto*. "Minto" he writes, "desired to prevent the followers of Islam from becoming a rigid *enclave* divorced from the rest of Indian life." Both Gokhale and Mr. Buchan lay the blame for the scheme as it was actually adopted upon Lord Morley's ignorant meddling which conceded a point on which Gokhale would make no compromise. That was about excessive representation. On this question Gokhale said :—

"When anyone said that his community was important and should receive fair and adequate representation, the claim was entitled to the sympathetic consideration of all. But when any one urged that his community was specially important and should therefore receive representation in excess of its fair share, the undoubted and irresistible implication was that the other communities were comparatively inferior and should receive less than their fair share. That was a position to which naturally the other communities

could not assent. British rule was based on equal treatment of all communities and the speaker trusted that the Government would never be so weak as to lean for support on any one community in particular."

Gokhale's trust was belied by the decision of Government but all the same it is impossible to deny the justice and equity of Gokhale's attitude. The decision in this matter changed the whole basis of British rule which, as Gokhale said, was the perfect equality of all subjects without distinction of caste or creed. It is worthy of note that it was only after Gokhale and Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, who also was stoutly opposed to excessive representation, passed away from the scene that the so called Lucknow Pact accepting and endorsing the principle of excessive representation was framed at the instance, of all men, of the late Mr. Tilak. While on this subject I would call attention to diverse meanings attached to the word community in connection with constitutional reform. Applied to the Europeans it refers to race. Applied to Indian Christian it is a combination of race and religion. In the case of Anglo-Indians the test is neither race nor religion but the intermingling of two races, the result of which is the absence of racial identity. With Mahommedans the difference is pure religion. It seems to me that the correct meaning of the word "community" is neither race nor religion but an endogamous group. In this sense which, I repeat is the only true sense, every Hindu caste and sub-caste

is a community, and the Hindus as a whole are an aggregate of communal minorities some of them much smaller than even the Parsees. If each of these Hindu minorities claimed representation for itself the result would be extremely interesting and it would tax the ingenuity of the promoters of the All-Minorities Conference to be shortly convened at Delhi to satisfy their demands. I seriously suggest that the Hindu castes and sub-castes should apply to the Committee of the All-Minorities Conference just formed to admit their representatives to the Conference. Someone described Socialism as a state of society in which everyone took every other's washing. The protection of minorities on the plan of the All-Minorities Conference means excessive representation to minorities at the expense of one another. I may take this opportunity of expressing my opinion that communal activities have their own proper spheres in which they can and are doing a world of good. Among Mahommedans, there is a quickening of interest in education which is due to communal awakening. Among Hindus, the Hindu Mahasabha, of which I am not a member and can, therefore, speak without bias, is doing wonderful work in several directions which have been hitherto grossly neglected.

THE DEPRESSED CLASSES AND THE INDIAN STATES

Gokhale felt deeply about the position of the "depressed" classes and earnestly called upon the

higher castes to adopt every means in their power to promote their education and facilitate their admission to honourable employment as the most important means of elevating them in the social scale. He would surely have sympathised with their claim for fair representation in the Legislative and other Councils. As regards Indian States, Gokhale's attitude was one of complete abstinence. This seems to have been the result not merely of political considerations but also of Gokhale's personal temperament. He once told me that he had made it a rule not to set foot in any Indian State and this feeling was somewhat aggravated when a late Dewan of Mysore issued an order prohibiting Mr. Srinivasa Sastri from making a speech at a public meeting in Bangalore. The Dewan made one or two attempts afterwards to meet Gokhale and explain his position but Gokhale I think, did not countenance them. Another occasion in which Gokhale acted similarly was one in which I was myself an intermediary. Mr. Lovat Fraser, perhaps the most brilliant English journalist who ever came out to India, expressed to me when he retired from the *Times of India* a wish to see Gokhale. Fraser was a staunch supporter of the Curzon regime and had not spared Gokhale who was its most powerful critic. Fraser said to me "You know we are often ashamed to read in the morning what we dash off in the night" and that he would like to make up with Gokhale, for whom he had a sincere respect before he left India. I duly conveyed the message to Gokhale and his reply was

characteristic. "I have no sort of dignity or sense of humiliation in approaching any Indian but as regards Englishmen," he said, "in the present circumstances of the country I must stand on my dignity. I will not call upon Mr. Lovat Fraser." The two men however met later in London and Gokhale told me that Fraser who was then influentially connected with the *London Times* and, besides, was in close touch with Lord Morley, was extremely helpful to him in getting into touch with leading English publicists.

GOKHALE ON CONSTITUTIONAL AGITATION

Gokhale visualised Indian Politics as the task specially and exclusively of the educated classes who had on the one side the huge mass of ignorance and illiteracy of the people to redeem and on the other to obtain from an able and powerful bureaucracy practical and substantial recognition of their right to direct the policies and shape the administration of the country. This is far from the idea of adult suffrage which has become a watchword during the last year or two. The sudden extension of the franchise in the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the thrusting of a phantom principle of responsibility to the Legislature are responsible for the general lowering of the calibre of public men and the standards of public life which are visible at the present day. Gokhale's ideas are clearly set forth in his address on "the Work before Us" to which I have already referred.

He laid down two essential conditions of constitutional agitation — the methods adopted should be legitimate and the changes desired should be obtained only through the action of constituted authorities by bringing to bear on them the pressure of public opinion. Three things were excluded —namely, rebellion, aiding or abetting a foreign invasion, and resort to crime. He went on to say :

“Roughly speaking, barring these three things, all else was constitutional. No doubt everything that was constitutional was not necessarily wise or expedient but that was a different matter. Prayers and appeals to justice lay at one end. Passive resistance, including even its extreme form of non-payment of taxes till redress was obtained, lay at the other end.”

This is how Gokhale conceived constitutional agitation and I like to lay special emphasis on it as I fear that Liberal leaders now-a-days are not always in touch with the first principles of the constitutional creed. A distinguished Liberal leader only the other day spoke of the attitude of Liberals as a constitutional party in case Government took repressive measures “in self-defence.” That phrase jarred on me at sight and on reflection I found the reason why it did. In the long ago when I played at being a law student, one of the few things that stuck in my head was that there can be no “act of State” as between a Government and its own subjects. The idea is that the State has no personality apart from its own subjects. When the Government of a State for the

time being finds itself seriously differing from its subjects the constitutional theory is that it should give place to a more responsible Government and not that it should repress its subjects into acquiescence with its own policies. This seems to be an elementary principle which lies at the root of constitutionalism and the idea of Government doing anything "in self-defence" is totally incompatible with it.

THE LIBERALS' ROLE IN INDIAN POLITICS

The scene comes vividly before my eyes of Gokhale with his arms protectingly encircling Mr. Tilak's person from being hustled off the platform at the Surat Congress, when the persistence of the latter in holding up the proceedings, led to indignant demands to have him bodily removed from it. It was then that a Dakshini shoe, hustling over the heads of the pressmen, glanced at Sir Pherozshah's face. Whenever I think of the duty of Indian constitutionalists to extremists when they are subjected, it may be as a consequence of their opinions or even conduct, to a regime of repression, that scene at Surat comes to my mind. The Liberals if they are true to their names cannot tolerate any encroachment on the personal freedom of political propagandists so long as their propaganda does not include commission of or incitement to crime. Gokhale was very firm on this question and in one of his speeches in the Legislative Council he made a trenchant reply to

Sir Harvey Adamson who had blamed the Liberals for not condemning the Extremists at public meetings. If you concede the right of self-defence to a Government, you cannot deny it to the people, and that, of course, means civil war. The immediate duty of the Liberals, to my mind, is to act as a reconciling influence between Government and the Gandhianites, to exert their full influence on the former to hasten on with reforms and to bring pressure to bear on the latter to await the result of the Round Table Conference before launching into civil disobedience and other disruptive propaganda. Mr. Gandhi has virtually promised this in one of his articles in his *Young India* and however much we may differ from him, we cannot doubt that he will keep his word. Liberals, after all, are nearer to Congressmen in spirit and aim, than to the bureaucracy, and they will do well to bear in mind in dealing with Congressmen as political adversaries, that it will not be long, if their expectations materialise, before they will have to deal with them as political friends and colleagues in carrying on the great task of Indian Swaraj! If those expectations do not materialise—there will be an end to constitutional reform and reformers, and there is no need to forecast their future relations with the Independence school.