

MY MASTER GOKHALE

by N. Vasudevan

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FOREWORD.

Whilst I appreciate Shri Jagdisan's invitation to contribute a few words by way of preface or foreword to his admirable collection of Rt. Hon'ble Sastriar's writings and speeches on Gokhale the Good as I would call him, it embarrasses me. However strange my claim may appear to the reader, I have called Gokhale my political Guru. Therefore, Sastriar is a fellow disciple. And what a disciple and yet an amiable usurper!!! I was to have the honour of being Gokhale's successor but I found in Sastriar a worthy usurper to whom I made a willing surrender. I could have given no satisfaction to the few well chosen members of the Society. I had and have no gifts which Gokhale had and Sastriar has in luxurious abundance.

I confess that however great may be my attempt at impartiality, I must fail to satisfy the critical reader. Fellow-admirers need no passport from me. And of whom was I to write? As I began to read Jagdisan's selection, I did not know whether Gokhale absorbed my attention or Sastriar.

Therefore, I would close these nasty and rambling *remarks* paragraphs by warning the critical reader against his or her trying the questionable task of discovering in these pages an echo of his or her own views. It should be enough to find in them the transparent sincerity and patriotism of the writer or, shall I say, the biographer and the master.

On train to Madras,
29th January, 1946.

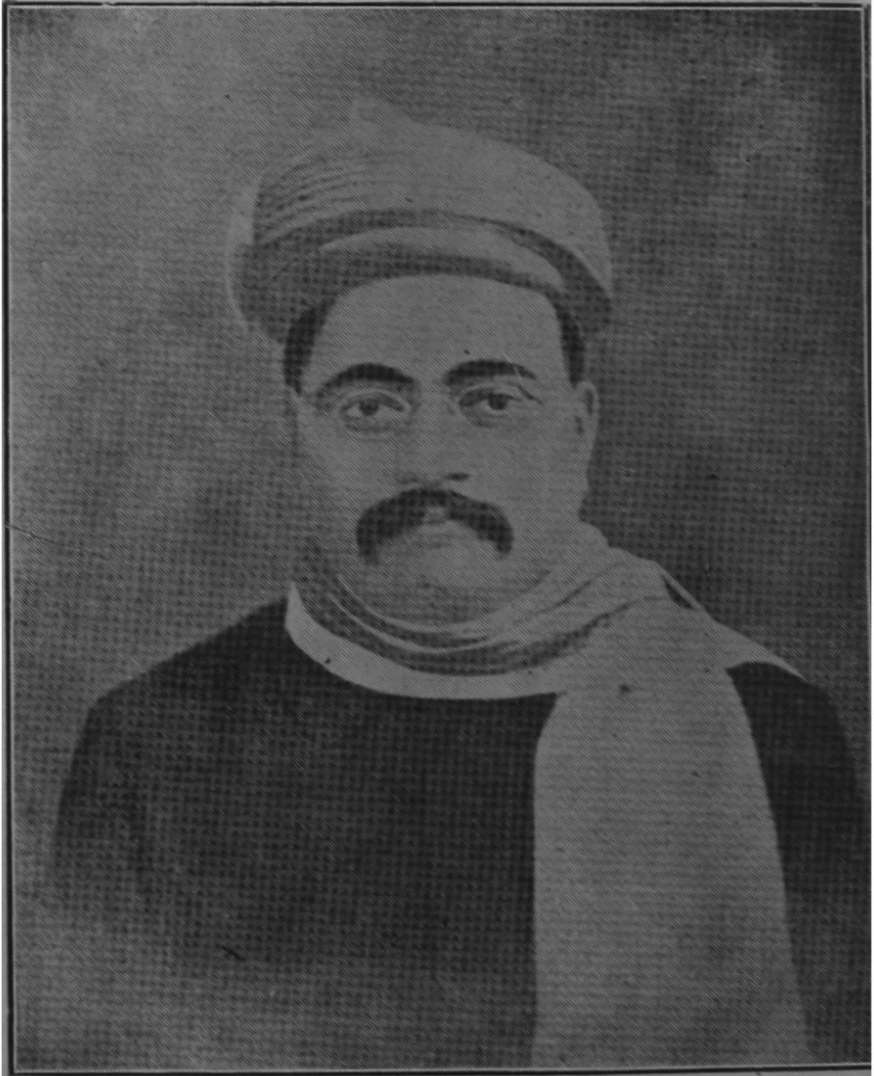
M. K. Gandhi

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GOKHALE'S POLITICAL WILL AND TESTAMENT

PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

The grant of Provincial Autonomy foreshadowed in the Delhi Despatch, would be a fitting concession to make to the people of India at the close of the war. This will involve the two-fold operation of freeing the Provincial Governments on one side from the greater part of the control which is at present exercised over them by the Government of India and the Secretary of State in connection with the internal administration of the country, and substituting on the other, in place of the control so removed, the control of the representatives of taxpayers through Provincial Legislative Councils. I indicate below in brief outline the form of administration that should be set up in different Provinces to carry out this idea.

Each Province should have :—

1. A Governor appointed from England at the head of the Administration.
2. A Cabinet or Executive Council of six members three of whom should be Englishmen and three Indians with the following portfolios :—
 - (a) Home (including Law and Justice).
 - (b) Finance.
 - (c) Agriculture, Irrigation and Public Works.
 - (d) Education.
 - (e) Local Self-Government (including Sanitation and Medical Relief).
 - (f) Industries and Commerce.

While members of the Indian Civil Service should be eligible for appointment to the Executive Council, no place in the Council should be reserved for them, the best men available being taken both English and Indian.

3. A Legislative Council of between 75 and 100 Members of whom not less than four-fifths should be elected by different constituencies and interests. Thus in the Bombay Presidency, roughly speaking, each District should return two members, one representing Municipalities and the other District and Taluk Boards. The City of Bombay should have about ten members allotted to it. Bodies in the Mofussil like the Karachi Chamber, Ahmedabad mill-owners, Deccan Sardars should have a member each. Then there would be the special representation of Mahomedans and here and there a member may have to be given to communities like the Lingayats where they are strong. There should be no nominated non-official members except as experts. A few official members may be added by the Governor as experts or to assist in representing the Executive Government.

4. The relations between the Executive Government and the Legislative Council so constituted should be roughly similar to those between the Imperial Government and the Reichstag in Germany. The Council will have to pass all Provincial legislation and its assent will be necessary to additions to or changes in Provincial taxation. The Budget too will have to come to it for discussion and its resolutions in connection with it, as also on questions of general administration will have to be given effect to unless vetoed by the Governor. More frequent meetings or longer continuous sittings will also

have to be provided for. But the members of the Executive Government shall not depend, individually or collectively, on the support of a majority of the Council, for holding the offices.

5. The provincial Government, so reconstituted and working under the control of the Legislative Council, as outlined above, should have complete charge of the internal administration of the Province and it should have virtually independent financial powers, the present financial relations between it and the Government of India being largely revised,—and to some extent even reversed. The revenue under Salt, Customs, Tributes, Railway, Post, Telegraph and Mint should belong exclusively to the Government of India, the services being Imperial while that under Land Revenue, including Irrigation, Exercise, Forests, Assessed taxes, Stamps and Registration, should belong to the Provincial Government, the services being Provincial. As under this division, the revenue falling to the Provincial Government will be in excess of its existing requirements and that assigned to the Government of India will fall short of its present expenditure, the Provincial Government should be required to make an annual contribution to the Government of India fixed for periods of five years at a time. Subject to this arrangement the Imperial and the Provincial Governments should develop their separate systems of finance, the Provincial Governments being given powers of taxation and borrowing within certain limits.

Such a scheme of Provincial Autonomy will be incomplete unless it is accompanied by (a) liberalizing of the present form of District administration and (b) a

great extension of Local Self-Government. For (a) it will be necessary to abolish the Commissionerships of Divisions except where special reasons may exist for their being maintained as in Sind and to associate small District Councils, partly elected and partly nominated, with the Collector to whom most of the present powers of the Commissioners could then be transferred—the functions of the Councils being advisory to begin with. For (b) Village Panchayats, partly elected and partly nominated should be created for villages and groups of villages and Municipal Boards in towns and Taluk Boards, the Talukas should be made wholly elected bodies, the Provincial Government reserving to itself and exercising stringent powers of control. A portion of the excise revenue should be made over to those bodies so that they may have adequate resources at their disposal for the due performance of their duties. The District being too large an area for efficient Local Self-Government by an honorary agency, the functions of the District Boards should be strictly limited and the Collector should continue to be its ex-officio President.

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

1. The Provinces being thus rendered practically autonomous, the Constitution of the Executive Council or the Cabinet of the Viceroy will have to be correspondingly altered. At present there are four members in that Council with portfolios which concern the internal administration of the country,—namely, Home, Agriculture, Education and Industries and Commerce. As all internal administration will now be made over to Provincial Governments and the Government of India will only retain in its hands nominal control to be exercised

(e) Communications (Railways, Post and Telegraph), and (f) Foreign.

The Legislative Council of the Viceroy should be styled the Legislative Assembly of India. Its members should be raised to about one hundred to begin with and its powers enlarged, but the principle of an official majority (for which perhaps it will suffice to substitute a nominated majority) should for the present be maintained, until sufficient experience has been gathered of the working of autonomous arrangements for Provinces. This will give the Government of India a reserve power in connection with Provincial administration to be exercised in emergencies. Thus if a Provincial Legislative Council persistently decline to pass legislation which the Government regard to be essential in the vital interests of the Province it could be passed by the Government of India in its Legislative Assembly over the head of the on very rare occasions, one member to be called member for the Interior should suffice in place of these four. It will, however, be necessary to create certain other portfolios and I would have the Council consist of the following six members at least two of whom shall always be Indians.

(a) Interior, (b) Finance, (c) Law, (d) Defence, Province. Such occasions would be extremely rare, but the reserve power will give a sense of security to the authorities and will induce them to enter on the great experiment of Provincial Autonomy with greater readiness. Subject to this principle of an official or nominated majority being for the present maintained the assembly should have increased opportunities of influencing the policy of the Government by discussion, ques-

tions connected with the Army and Navy (to be now created) being placed on a level with other questions. In fiscal matters the Government of India so constituted should be freed from the control of the Secretary of State whose control in other matters too should be largely reduced, his Council being abolished and his position steadily approximated to that of the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Commissions in the Army and Navy must now be given to Indians, with proper facilities for Military and Naval instructions.

German East Africa, if conquered from the Germans, should be reserved for Indian colonization and should be handed over to the Government of India.

