

GOKHALEANA

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Foreword

Shri. K. Chandrasekharan, the author of the article on Gokhale contained in this issue has had the rare and good fortune of having seen the late Gopal Krishna Gokhale in flesh and blood during his several visits to Madras, in the first decade of this century, when he invariably stayed as the guest of his illustrious father, the late Sri. V. Krihnaswamy Aiyar.

Shri Chandrasekharan who is an advocate by profession was also for sometime the Editor of the Indian Law Reporter, Madras series. He was Tagore Professor of humanities in the University of Madras and has several scholarly publications to his credit. Besides, he is an erudite scholar in Sanskrit, Tamil and English and is widely respected in literary and art circles. He is the author of a full length biography of his father in Tamil and of Sir P.S Sivaswamy Aiyar in English in the Builders of Modern India series.

He is also connected with the Madras Sanskrit college, and the Venkataramana Ayurvedic college both founded by his father and the Kalakshetra the internationally well known art centre started by Shrimathi Rukmini Devi.

I am sure admirers of Sri Gopal Krishna Gokhale will find this sketch of Gokhale by Sri Chandrasekharan interesting.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale

BY SRI K. CHANDRASEKHARAN

"I do not want to make Gokhale's memory cheap. The country is not at present in a mood properly to observe the 19th day of February. Its importance and sacredness will be appreciated in history" ¹ said Gandiji and his faithful aide-de-camp, Mahadev Desai, noted it in his diary. The words were uttered by the Mahatma at a function to mark the anniversary of Gokhale's death. Certainly the importance and sacredness attached to the memory of such a great soul cannot be the less on any account, if associated with his birthday. And the history of our freedom struggle will be only richer for the observance of his birth centenary.

Nearly fiftyone years have gone by since the passing away of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and still his name evokes in the hearts of the people here reverence mingled with gratitude. No doubt, very few among his contemporaries can be alive today. Fewer still can have recollections of his personality, and perhaps none born after 1915; can have the same experience of thrill at the mention of his name as those earlier born. Yet to recall what he has done for this country at a time when politics and public life were not claiming the entire pre-occupation of even the best of publicists is to learn a lot and to gain much in knowledge of selfless service for the re-generation of the motherland.

Considering the great strides this country has taken since Gokhale's time, one may not feel easily reconciled to the 'constitutional agitation' of his politics as of any consequence to guide men in public life. True, the entire concept of political life today has very little in common with

¹ Gopal Krishna Gokhale-by Parvate P 402

the aspirations of Gokhale and the philosophy which influenced him to dedicate himself as a Servant of India. Further, the times we are living in, have witnessed a wave of liberation from colonialism of the Western powers, that has swept over many Asian and African States in the wake of India's momentous achievement of Independence. Far from any attempt being made to compare or contrast the present times with the early struggles for freedom by Gokhale, his predecessors and contemporaries, let us try more to profit by the essentials of character and steadfastness in public life which were responsible for shaping him to be, first and last, a perfect Servant of India. There can be no gainsaying the benefit one can derive from drawing sustenance from that life, for the purpose of ensuring progress and stability in our objectives to serve well any public cause, whether political, social or economic.

If the Mahatma once wrote, "However strange my claim may appear to the reader, I have called Gokhale, my Political Guru"² its significance cannot be lost on a Nation which had never reposed in any other political leader so much faith and confidence as in Gandhiji. It is said that even as early as 1895, when Gandhiji returned to India from the South African struggle in order to induce the Congress Leaders of those times to take active interest in his campaign against the Union Government of South Africa for their inhuman treatment of our nationals, he singled out Gokhale as much nearer his heart than the other celebrities in political life. "He was and remains for me the most perfect man in the political field. Every word of Gokhale glowed with his tender feeling, truthfulness and patriotism. I believe he had the capacity cheerfully to mount the gallows for the country's sake if necessary".³ Tributes such as this

2 My Master Gokhale by Rt Hon. V S Srinivasa-Sastriar. Forward.

3 Gopal Krishna Gokhale by Parvate p 3

could never emanate from Gandhiji's lips unless he was sure of the man whom he praised. Indeed, he went further to add, "He (Gokhale) did not wear his religion on his sleeve; he lived it."

It is not as if Gandhiji alone, having been himself a man of acute spiritual perception, had observed it of Gokhale for the first time. It was the strong belief of Gokhale himself when he founded his organisation, the Servants of India Society that "public life must be spiritualised." In promoting the idea of a band of workers dedicated to the cause of service for the country, he was not satisfied with any thing less than a fervent patriotism which rejoices at every opportunity of sacrifice for the motherland; a dauntless heart which refuses to be turned back from its object by difficulty or danger; a deep faith in the purpose of providence which nothing can shake..."⁴

It must chasten our hearts and purify our aims to know how the man was able to achieve such an amount of glory during the brief span of forty nine years, how he toiled uninterruptedly for ushering in a great change in outlook of his countrymen, how from the beginning of his public life he showed little self-importance or unwanted rivalry with co-workers in the same field, how ever he bore wounds inflicted with patience and never once retaliated even when unjustly humiliated, how respectful he remained to the last to some of the earlier pioneers of political emancipation for this country and how his good nature withstood any attempt on the part of adversaries to break his patriotic firmness or tamper with his incorruptibility. These and more endeared him to the choicest spirits of the age and no wonder his name and solid achievements, however indifferently viewed from this distance of time as well as in retrospect of the vast changes overtaken Independent India, still prove of such merit that none with any real political background can ignore them.

4. Ibid P. 193.

Coming to the origin of this great man, the Maharashtras belong to a race whose constructive genius bore evidences in their supremacy for some time in holding sovereignty over an extensive area of this land. Even today if one looks at Poona, the ancient seat of power of the Maharashtrian Empire, one cannot despair of finding institutions that are eloquently bearing marks of the practical organisation and sustaining zeal of leaders for worthy causes, to raise the humble and the downtrodden to a higher life. If it is still fragrant with memories of saints like Thukaram and Ramdass, in the past, it has no less in recent times given birth to a galaxy of memorable names like Ranade, Bhandarkar, Telang, Tiliak, Chandavarkar and Savarkar, whose achievements can even be reckoned as in no way inferior to some of the worthiest in any other part of this vast sub-continent.

The Gokhales came from a sturdy stock. The exact village in which Gopal Krishna Gokhale was born of humble parents was known as Kotluk in Chiplun Taluka of Ratnagiri District. His father, Krishna Rao, earned the title of '*v. ghoba*' or tiger, evidently indicating his indomitable nature. His mother Satyabhama, pious and tender hearted, as usual of women of her generation, possessed exemplary devotion to her husband, as later noticed in the way she could cherish and treasure for long a gold bordered scarf of her deceased husband. Krishna Rao was a classmate of Ranade whom Gokhale revered as his Guru with an exceptional sense of his own indebtedness to him for whatever knowledge and studies he later brought to bear on problems. Having been nurtured in his maternal grand father's home during his childhood, he with his elder brother, Govind, spent the time in learning at school at Kagal. The 9th of May, 1866, as we are told, saw the birth of this extraordinary child, noted not for any prodigious feat of intellect or memory but for his unassuming habits and sincerity from his early schooldays. He lost his father in 1879 while he was only thirteen years old, and from that time his elder brother took upon himself the burden of the family even as his elder brother's wife offered her

all to help the younger brother at school and college to gain his credentials.

At Elphinstone college in Bombay as well as partly in the Deccan College at Poona he was an undergraduate and barely at eighteen years of age he was a fullfledged graduate. Years of strenuous toil they were for him, but his favourable stars destined him for close contacts with men of superior calibre and breadth of vision. like Mahadev Govinda Ranade, a name which conjures up for many a generation of historians, scholars and legal luminaries, a picture of robust unwearying study and indefatigable energy to master details of any massive subject. The Deccan Education Society at Poona was an exacting association of intellectuals which drew from the ranks of men of prodigious labours members on its roll. Apte, Agarkar and Tilak were already the shining lights there, when young Gokhale got admission into its fold. The Fergusson College which retained on its staff of professors, men who under a self denying ordinance not to seek for emoluments greater than the pittance of Rs. 75/-, as a month's salary, attracted Gokhale, raw from his college, to offer his services for teaching mathematics, and English literature, though history and political economy became more and more his main subjects. His spirit of self-denial already full to the brim in him, naturally inspired him to, dedicate himself for nearly eighteen years in the cause of education which meant in those days for him not only preparation for lecturing to students of the college classes but also for collecting funds for the institution needing financial help from the philanthropic public.

Along with his college pre-occupations public life gained his attention, especially when his alliance with Ranade grew closer and with the master's growing interest in him. Together they pored over heavy tomes and Government publications not excluding dreary files of statistics. Their increasing collaboration in the work of the Sarvajanic Sabha and Gokhale's role as its Secretary and later as the Editor of its quarterly organ, all gradually

intensified the bonds of their mutual affection and respect. Thanks to his arduous labours under the direct guidance of Ranade, Gokhale's knowledgefulness assumed proportions of a kind not within the scope or capacity of any other younger person of his age. So, when he was elected to the Secretaryship of the Provincial Conference of Bombay and later in 1895 was asked to share the onerous duties of the Secretaries of the Reception Committee of the National Congress (Meeting) at Poona, his services lacked neither in distinction nor in promptness. Perhaps it was the first Congress of those early times that he participated in with full scope for his own powers of organisation, arrangement and control of affairs.

It was also quite unusual that while so young in years he was chosen to go to England along with men of such established standing in public life like D. E. Wacha, Surendranath Banerji and G. Subramania Ayyar, as a witness to give evidence before the Welby Commission appointed in 1897, to investigate the problems of Indian Expenditure. Normally any other person with lesser equipment and morale would have either floundered in the course of his answers to searching questions from stalwarts in the Commission or returned after the ordeal a much-battered vessel having spent itself in the storms and cyclones on strange seas. Gokhale, on the other hand, earned plaudits for his very satisfactory analysis of the problems posed as well as his suggestion for reforms in the financial field. Apart from the recorded appreciation of the Commission, he received encomiums individually from some of the members like Sir William Wedderburn, for the outstanding quality of his evidence. Gokhale unlike small minds, never once felt puffed up with pride of his achievement of the allotted task but with exemplary balance and restraint attributed the success of his mission to the able tutorship of leaders like Ranade and Joshi, at whose feet in literal traditional manner he laid the tributes received, as his *Guru-dakshina* for them to accept.

Fortune is sometimes trickish in its ways; while endowing him with unprecedented capacities for impressing both on the authorities of the Government as well as on veterans at home by his quick grasp of financial, political and economic intricacies of the Indian problems, betrayed him by exposing his behaviour to ridicule and serious chastisement from unexpected quarters. What is known as the Apology Incident came upon him with a suddenness to tarnish his high credential for probity and fairness. While in England he had received reports from intimate friends in Poona complaining of the despicable conduct of British soldiers, while engaged in plague relief operations in violating the chastity of two women. Believing in their statements which were no doubt imparted under strict confidence, he wrote in the **Manchester Guardian** of England under his name an article describing the entire plague relief operation by the Government of Lord Sandhurst as ignominiously impaired by such unpardonable activities as of the soldiers mentioned. The Government of Bombay made a thorough investigation of the entire complaint and challenged Gokhale for proofs of his charges. The expected help from his correspondents was not forthcoming to meet the challenge and Gokhale, bound in honour not to disclose the names of his informants, paid the penalty for his rash act in rushing to the press and calling for redress of wrongs. However perturbed he was, he sought advice of his respected leaders who counselled him to apologise publicly for his grossly incorrect statements in the press. He did it with no reserve. Still the Governor was under mortification at the effrontery offered to his Government. Gokhale's opponents would not pardon him for his apology which, according to some, was unnecessarily couched in demeaning terms. For some years in succession Gokhale never tried to speak on the Congress platform; his own remorse was such that except by the expiation of his sins through silence, he would not be worthy of confidence of the people at large in future.

But his spirit never got depressed; men of greater experience like Ranade and Wedderburn encouraged him to forget the wounds and pursue his unsullied path towards greater striving for educating his countrymen to deserve reforms and political emancipation before desiring them. In the years 1901 and 1902 he became an elected member of the Bombay Legislative Council where he played no mean part. While protesting against the Bombay Land Revenue Code Amendment Bill over which a bitter controversy raged, he unwillingly followed his leader Pherozshah Mehta in a walk out of the Council Chamber. Gokhale was not for any demonstration of feeling, however justified in its intensity, before the public. Still loyalty to elders forced him to follow Mehta.

His collegiate connection necessarily had to be surrendered as his pledge to serve the Deccan Education Society for twenty years had been fulfilled and in view of his whole time pre-occupation with politics. So in 1902, he bid farewell to his colleagues and his pupils, and thereafter concentrated all his energies for the country's regeneration. His pension of Rs. 30/- which he received could hardly sustain him. In those early years the Congress organisation itself depended on bounties from well-meaning quarters and hence selfless workers of Gokhale's stamp rarely received the needed aid for keeping up their programmes even for physical movements from place to place in the cause of the Congress. Thus under trying circumstances but with no whisper even by way of complaint, Gokhale launched his frail boat upon the perilous seas of public life.

When Mehta withdrew his candidature for the Imperial Council, Gokhale stepped into his shoes with a naturalness which received adequate support from the electorate. By dint of his work in the local council, his reputation to represent the electorate in councils had become considerable enough to evoke expectations. Soon he proved also how much deserving he was of the country's confidence in his powers of presenting the Indian aspirations for self-government before not only the Government of India but the Parliament in England. His budgetary

speeches in consecutive years from 1902 onwards were performances of high excellence, both for their solid contribution to the unravelling of the mystery hanging round high finance as well as for constructive ideas to improve budgetary proposals for utilisation in progressive channels of the country's education, sanitation Indianisation of services and reduction of military expenditure. Lord Curzon, then whom a more acute critic of Indian aspirations had not existed, on occasions expressed his personal admiration of Gokhale's powers of persuasion. The country, including some of the strong adherents to the extreme section of the Congress, congratulated him on his mastery of details and able exposition of financial policies. Speaking on the budget in 1902 he said referring to the taxation on salt thus: "A taxation so forced as not only to maintain a budgetary equilibrium but to yield as well large, continuous, progressive surpluses even in years of trial and suffering is, I submit, against all accepted canons of finance. This only shows that more money is being taken from the people than is right, necessary or advisable or in other words, the weight of public taxation has been fixed or maintained at an unjustifiably high level". He further dilated upon the need for utilisation of surpluses for crying requirements as education, sanitation etc. One can certainly, on reading his remarks, entertain little doubt regarding the unequivocal language he employed and yet at the same time the introduction of no heat in his arguments. The reduction of the Salt Tax figures much in speech after speech of his, while dwelling upon the budgetary proposals. There was some comfort felt all over the country when as a result of his endeavours a gesture from the Government emanated in reducing the duty on salt. 'A succession of large surpluses is little conducive to economy and is apt to demoralise even the most conscientious Governments by the temptation it offers for indulging in extravagant expenditure' were his words. If Gandhiji much later in 1930 selected for his programme of obstructing the government Salt Satyagraha, one will not be far wrong in imagining the influence on him of Gokhale's frequent harping on the abolition of the Salt duty.

Gokhale's mental outlook was always suffused with a philosophy that constitutional agitation alone will be a proper weapon to force gradually our rulers into a mood of allowing us greater share in the governance of the country. With the best of intentions the horizon then could not extend beyond Dominion Status for India within the British Commonwealth. His liberalism was derived from studying Johnstuart Mill and his personal inheritance from Ranade and Dadabhai Naoroji. Perhaps in its fundamental basis even today it holds good. May be the particular objectives and the arguments employed by Gokhale do not find any validity in the circumstances of the cataclysmic changes that come over us. Still in matters of intimate understanding of dangers confronting a people even when ruled by their own representative principles of liberalism may have to be resorted to for safety from oppression of any party in power.

To elaborate at some more length the mind of Gokhale in relation to great issues in public life, we can unhesitatingly express that in believing that public life should be spiritualized he really had principles not easily within reach of the generality of politicians. He scrupulously avoided personalities in his avowed reactions and comments; he never would give occasion to suspect the good faith and motives of his opponents; when differences arose as far as possible he would try to allow for others the same consideration as he would like himself to be shown. Further at whatever cost, dedicated service should be, for him, the only channel of patriotism.

Having said all this, one should not misjudge him or his activities in England as a chosen agent of the Indian Congress to seek individual members of parliament to support the Indian claim for self government through personal contacts and appeals to their sense of justice. The times were very turbulent in the history of our struggle for liberation. The partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon effected in the teeth of opposition from all sections of the people of India, generated throughout Bengal, among the

youth, especially, secret societies for resorting to violence and other acts of injury to the ruling power. Repressive measures naturally became the order of the day and untold miseries followed in the wake of mutual recrimination by both the Government authorities and the political leaders: Bepin Chandra Pal, Tilak and an entire dissatisfied section of the Congress advocated boycott of Government institutions, Swadeshi and burning of foreign goods, withdrawal from councils etc which became later the very planks of the platform for non-cooperators under Gandhiji. But in the years between 1906 such movements threatened to appear as anti-social activities and persons of Gokhale's persuasion grew anxious at the growing disaffection in the country. It was in that atmosphere Gokhale proceeded to England and was able to develop extraordinary good relationship with Lord Morley, the Secretary of State for India. Many were the interviews Gokhale had with Lord Morley in order to impress on him the necessity for England to allow greater share in the governance of the country, to enlightened Indians. The satisfaction that Gokhale felt, which he was ready to disclose in his letters to friends in India was the friendly attitude of the Secretary of State for India towards him and his strong case for reforms forthwith, in order to relieve the tension in India. 'It is not a question of how many interviews I would grant you but of how many you would give me. And if you are equal to ten I would like to have all ten of them'" was what Morley had said which he conveyed to one of his friends in Madras, V. Krishnaswami Iyer. Such a tone of accommodation from the Secretary of State naturally drew from Gokhale words of relief and comfort which he could not keep back from his friends also sharing. Again to Krishnaswami Iyer he wrote 'But this much I may tell you that I am delighted with these interviews more than I can tell. It was worthwhile com-

5 Letter of Gokhale to Krishnaswami Ayar 8-6-1906

ing to this country even for these two interviews I have so far had with Mr Morley"⁶

He had to return to India while he was in the midst of his work in England. Having been elected as the President of the Congress to meet at Banares, 1905, he had to summon up all his courage and integration in convincing his colleagues and his countrymen of the responsibilities weighing upon them in order to receive any measure of Reforms then in the contemplation of the British Parliament. His address to the assembled delegates of the Congress at Banares started first with a reference to the then raging topic namely the Partition of Bengal and incidentally he could not refrain from bringing the Viceroy within his sharp criticism: "Lord Curzon's highest ideal of statesmanship is efficiency of administration. He does not believe in what Mr. Gladstone used to call the principle of liberty as a factor of human progress. He has no sympathy with popular aspirations and when he finds them among a subject people, he thinks he is rendering their country a service by trying to put them down".⁷

Next referring to the Swadeshi movement he assessed its worth and admonished the persons responsible for it to understand the implications of the movement and the consequent responsibilities for avoiding ugly developments. Then he proceeded to paint the political situation in India and struck an optimistic note owing to the possibilities of the Liberal party in England having come to power and showing greater understanding of the realities of the situation. Paying a tribute to Lord Morley he harangued: "He, the reverent student of Burke, the disciple of Mill, the friend and biographer of Gladstone— will he courageously apply their principles and his own to the Government of this country, or will he too succumb to the

⁶ Ibid

⁷ G. K. Gokhale by Natesan & Co., p. 19.

influences of India Office around him, and thus cast a cruel blight on hopes, which his own writings have done so much to foster?".

In the history of our struggle for freedom the part so efficiently played by Gokhale had its own vicissitudes of popular appeal and reaction. What he feared regarding Morley's yielding to the India Office came out true when in collaboration with Lord Minto, the ultimate Reform proposals dwindled in a great measure in their actual efficacy owing to the Regulations framed for implementing them. The militant section of the Congress under Tilak and others became very vocal and antagonistic to the meagre show of gesture from England in the matter of the Reforms. In 1905 the Calcutta Congress under Dababhai Naorji passed resolutions on Swadeshi, boycott, etc in a tense atmosphere. Surat witnessed in the next year untoward scenes during the Session which became the starting ground for marked division in the ranks of tried Congressmen. The Moderates as the party to which Mehta, Wacha, Gokhale and others belonged, for the time being gained enough strength to steer the old ship of the Congress clear of further shoals and rocks by the formation of a Convention to carry on the work of the Congress. If anything, Gokhale's resolution in support of the Minto-Morley Reforms which was announced on the eve of the Madras Congress of 1908, established for the time being somewhat purchased a lull. Within of course a few months the separate electorate for Muslims introduced in the Bill of Reforms caused the beginnings of the two nation theory which later ended in the Partition of India itself.

For a while let us take leave of Gokhale's part in the Congress and pass on to the substantial contribution of his to the public life of India in starting the Servants of India Society at Poona. Some months earlier Gokhale had been seriously considering the usefulness of a band of workers in our midst fully equipped with studies and

practical knowledge of the working of economic and political forces upon the Administration in other advanced countries like England. Having himself received enough training under men like Ranade, Joshi and others which had prepared him while quite young in public life to render a good account of himself, he felt the need for an organised attempt to train younger spirits who might show a better understanding in public affairs of this country in the coming years. The select group of compact and trustworthy younger men would have to be in constant touch with extant text books, blue books, Government publications and other literature, who by widely travelling the country and personal observation of actualities could integrate the material gathered by study, travel and observation into an experience hard otherwise to obtain and who could be relied upon under any circumstances to be ready to burden themselves with any responsibility. So on June 12th 1905, the foundation for the Society was laid solemnly and with a firm resolve to go ahead with the *Ni-kama-karma* of political Sanyasins. Three recruits to the Society in the persons of Natesh, Appaji Dravid Anant Vinayak Patwardhan and Gopala Krishna Devadher were first sworn in to uphold the objects of the Association. The vows seriatim to be taken are briefly these: (i) That the country will always be the first in their thoughts and they will give it the best in them; (ii) no personal advantage to themselves will be sought; (iii) that all Indians, will be regarded as brothers without any regard to their caste or creed; (iv) they will be content with provision for themselves and their families as are permitted by the resources of the Society to make; they will not engage in any other occupation for personal earning; (v) that purity of personal life will be maintained; (vi) personal quarrels with any one will be abandoned and (vii) that the interest of the Society should be their prime care and they will watch with vigilance the Society's welfare.

No doubt certain misgivings were expressed about the success of an organisation like that with severe restrictions. The vigours of a political Sanyasin will be harder than the austerities self-imposed by an anchorite. Mehta doubted

its practicability in the long run. Principal Selby was responsible for inducing Gokhale to alter a rule which favoured 'absolute obedience' of one's will and conscience to the President or First Member for five years and insert in its place the words 'to place oneself under the guidance and control of the first member'. V Krishnaswami Ayyar, counselled Gokhale to inform the Government authorities of the rules and objectives of the Society, lest otherwise they should be entertaining unnecessary suspicion of the Society's objective and be causing endless hardships to its smooth working.

V S Srinivasa Sastri (later the Rt Hon V S S Sastri), Dr Kunzru the present President, Thakkar Bapu, Devdhar Vaze, Kodanda Rao (later resigned), S R Venkataraman, Sivaswami (now no more), A D Mani (Nagpur) M P., are some of the distinguished members of the Servants of India Society. The Missionary spirit which should actuate the members was insisted upon and a rule to that effect was adumbrated in its constitution. Needless to give in full the preamble of the Society's constitution, to indicate its nature a few sentences taken from it may be useful: "The Servants of India Society has been established to meet in some measure these requirements of the situation. Its members frankly accept the British connection as ordained in the inscrutable dispensation of providence for India's good. Self - Government within the Empire for their country and higher life generally for their countrymen as their goal. The Servants of India Society will train men prepared to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit, and will seek to promote by all constitutional means, the national interests of the Indian people".

The Society needed financial aid, and as long as its first member and president was alive it had no worries concerning funds to run the institution. Many friends in the merchant ranks and the world of big business in Bombay and other important cities of India, volunteered their

support in the form of donations. No doubt the early experiments in the selection of members proved somewhat indefinite but the basic qualification of a graduate was soon accepted as a standard equipment for any member wishing to join the Society. Whatever record may leap to light, the Society's achievements in the hard and able work turned out during the past half a century and more can never be deemed insignificant or ordinary.

The Minto-Morley Reforms soon were put into operation and as a consequence the Executive in the provinces and the Imperial Government took in an Indian Councillor with a distinguished record of services to the country. The non official representation in the councils also was widened with the result more persons could discuss subjects like budgetary proposals and government sponsored bills, individual members could bring in private bills. Negligible as were these advantages, the co operation from the moderates enabled the Government of the day not to face any vexation, despite the extremists biding their time to give trouble. The subject of Elementary Education was introduced by Gokhale in the year 1910 by a resolution to be moved for the formation of a Committee to be appointed to examine the question itself, whether free and compulsory education in the elementary stages could be useful and if so how to realise it. He met with opposition from the Government and he had to drop it. But again in the next year he resorted to reviving it in the form of a bill for making education, generally compulsory in the country. It was a very limited measure and in some quarters raised the justified criticism of its benefits in any substantial measure, even if passed. Today viewing it from our advanced political condition, it looks very insufficient. But in the then atmosphere even such a measure had its own distinct influence over the country. The bill actually provided by seeking to give local bodies, municipalities and district boards, as were inclined the power and option of exerting compulsion within their jurisdiction. It was a permissive legislation. Compulsion can only be effected after availing itself of the permission provided in the bill and such com

pulsion can only be directed to boys and not to girls. Other details in the shape of provisions and exceptions to such provisions were also inserted in the Bill. Government was not averse, at the outset, to the bill and hence they wanted Gokhale to go round the country and do propaganda for support to the bill. But in the next year's session of the imperial Legislative council when Gokhale moved for sending the bill to the select Committee for detailed examination, the veto of the Government was on it. The attitude of the powers that be in the passage of the bill proved an enormous stumbling block, and so the elementary education Bill of Gokhale became a stillborn one. Maybe failure of the bill becoming law does not redound to Gokhale's great influence with the Government. Still his earnestness, already much in evidence by his work as a teacher for eighteen years and more as well as his able criticism of Lord Curzon's University Act of 1904 stood foursquare to all the winds of ill directed criticisms hurled at him. One definite offshoot of his labours was the creation of a wide awakening in the land that in order to be future citizens of a democracy, India's coming generations ought to have enough education and preparation to work the Democracy towards its destined success.

South Africa, in the wake of the experiments of Gandhiji in Passive resistance had shown to the world at large what a frail person can achieve when wedded to truth and non-violence in resisting injustice and ill-government. Gandhiji's name had already become a watch-word for purity and persistence in public life. Gokhale's early association with Gandhiji since 1896, laid the foundation for an abiding faith in the work of the Satyagrahi as Gandhiji called himself. To the forefront was brought the question of the sufferings of Indian nationals of South Africa. Gokhale, having become Gandhiji's adjutant in his sacred mission, accepted the invitation to go to South Africa and examine the problems for himself. In order to secure some measure of security for our people in that continent an attempt should be made to restrict indentured

labour from emigrating further from India, lest in their apprehension of greater numbers of Indians swamping them in their new homes, the whites should heap up hardships on them. Gandhiji and Gokhale concurred in the view that by prohibiting farther influx of emigrants from India to Africa, the condition of the existing settlers there could be improved. But Mehta and others were not acquiescing in that proposal, as it would be depriving the British subjects, as Indians then were, of a fundamental right to move from place to place within the Empire. From the point of view of ardent patriots, the whole thing looked a compromise. Still in 1912 for the time being, it proved a solution of the burning topic of the day of the sufferings of the Indian nationals in South Africa. The Cape Town Agreement, as it was called, did not have the wished for permanency of effect in restoring amity between the two races, as subsequent history of the South African struggle proved. Later, Lord Hardinge the Viceroy of India, played a laudable role in assuaging the grief of the passive resisters by a forthright utterance of his sympathies for their cause.

To further narrate the South African struggle, will take us into events and activities with which the subject of our sketch hardly bears any connection. Still, one thing must be mentioned namely that the commission appointed to go into the grievances of the South African Indian settler was boycotted by Gandhiji and his followers. Despite Gokhale's warnings sent to Gandhiji to cease from the passive resistance and to provide evidence before the the Commission, Gandhiji relied on his faith in God and disappointed Gokhale by stating that, once a vow was taken he would not break it or swerve an inch from it. This was too much for Gokhale, especially when his health was declining due to acute diabetes. He was found in one of his exhaustingly irritable moods to which Sastriar refers in his "My Master - Gokhale," thus: 'Surely the Viceroy is right. Gandhi has no business to tie himself up. Ours

is politics and compromise is its essence"⁸ The vow Gandhiji took stood the test of resistance and nobly Lord Hardinge finally acquiesced in the proposal of Gandhiji. Whatever might have been the momentary outburst of Gokhale, his abiding tribute to Gandhiji deserves reference here for its accuracy of portrayal. In the Lahore Congress of 1909, while dwelling on the South African problem, Gokhale broke into eloquent words of Gandhiji's qualities. We have to realise that the words were spoken at a time when many others in India, even among the leaders, had not any clear perception of what Gandhiji would prove to be if he were to lead the country. He said: "After the immortal part which Mr Gandhi has played in this affair, I must say it will not be possible for any Indian, at any time here or in any other assembly of Indians, to mention his name without deep emotion and pride. It is one of the privileges of my life that I know Mr. Gandhi intimately and I can tell you that a purer, a nobler, a braver, a more exalted spirit has never moved on this earth. Mr. Gandhi is one of those men who living an austere simple life themselves and devoted to all the highest principles of love to their fellow beings and to truth and justice, touch the eyes of their weaker brethren as with magic and give them a new vision. He is a man who may well be described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots and we may as well say that in him Indian humanity at the present time has reached its high water mark." To have given utterance to such a description of Gandhi one should have had in himself such an amount of patriotism love of humanity, fair play and adherence to truth, apart from an overwhelming sense of humility, that could refrain from any effect of rhetoric or language for portraying him so correctly. If today the world owns it had witnessed a phenomenal force of truth and an apostle of ahimsa in the Mahatma, words fail to estimate the soundness of Gokhale's foresight and judgment long, long before even Gandhiji himself

8. My master Gokhale by Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri p 191.

ever dreamed of launching upon his colossal campaigns of satyagraha in the Indian struggle.

One cannot ignore the fact, however, that Gokhale's health during these years had been considerably undermined and many were the occasions while in England he had to consult doctors and specialists regarding his malady. But notwithstanding his exhaustion and poor recoupment by foreign travels, he was prepared for joining a Royal Commission of the Public Services in India, as a member, on September 5th, 1912 under the Chairmanship of Lord Islington, Sir Abdur Rahim a Judge of the Madras High Court then and M. B. Chabral were the other two. Indians along with eight other Englishmen of great distinction. The Commission was directed to investigate the claims of Indians to higher and more extensive employment in the Public Services connected with the Civil administration of the country. In Madras first the Commission started functioning and heard evidence of men of such experience and eminence as Sri P. S. Sivaswamy Ayyar. The work of the Commission in hearing evidence was almost finished and Gokhale had not completed his labours when his sudden death intervened in the bestowal on India of a document which certainly would have been totally different from what it was, if Gokhale had had a hand in its shaping.

Gokhale's thoughts of this country never once grew less in spite of his waning health and difficulties to concentrate long on any problem. Just a few months after the first great war broke out, India proved fully how much she could do of her best to aid the Allies with men, material and money. As a grateful recipient of such unstinting help, England wished to show her readiness in returning good for good. Lord Willingdon, the then Governor of Bombay, who was in close correspondence with Gokhale, sought of Gokhale for a draft of reforms which to some extent would satisfy India's demand. But Gokhale did not acquiesce in the request without being

allowed to consult Mehta and H.H. the Aga Khan. But it was not actually fulfilled as it took time for all the three to meet and agree upon something feasible. Still Gokhale would not refrain from preparing a scheme of the constitution in pencil draft, a copy of which was also sent to Lord Willingdon. The note was wrongly termed **Gokhale's Political will and Testament**, and it never got published inspite of the fact that the entire draft got transmitted to the higher authorities in time by Lord Willingdon. Only in August, 1917 it was allowed to see the light of day when the Mont-ford Reforms were on the anvil. Persons like Sastriar who had occasion to look into that draft and comment upon its contents have stated thus: "To read them now you would think that the interval between its composition and now was not interval between 1915 and 1935, but perhaps three times as long; for affairs in India have gone so far, the constitution has advanced by such leaps and bounds since the day that you wonder whether Gokhale was a man of liberal and bold ideas. That he was". Judging of its merits today when again we are far far advanced and have become an independent sovereign republic, we may not quite appreciate the draft of Gokhale with the best of our intention and imagination. But the test is how the trends of his thoughts of the future of the country in case of political advance, were proceeding. Viewed in that manner the constitution set out by Gokhale cannot be said to have fallen far short of the expectations of his countrymen in the circumstances.

It is not always possible for posterity to judge aright of every bit of activity of a great man of the past in the light of new experiences gained and fresh knowledge acquired. On the other hand to prepare ourselves for a magnified picture of the man is not unusual, considering the paucity of persons to bear witness to actual events and the latitude to be allowed for slight variations in details owing to accretion of different versions inevitable by the long lapse of time. But in the case of Gokhale fortunately records and documents and letters both his contemporaries in this country and elsewhere has been so well

preserved that impressions then and there formed and incidents then and there recorded amply tend to show how much, without any adventitious aid, his personality and good work could yet be assessed at their true worth.

Gokhale was not of more than medium height and his face under the peculiar crimson pugree normally worn by Maharashtra people, was an unforgettable one. His gold rimmed spectacles, gave his comely countenance a certain attraction which was not very striking in its powerful appeal but in its quiet softness and dignified repose. It was said of his department on the platform that there was never any special demonstration by show of gesture. On the other hand the evenness of his flow of language, and that too in correct English, happened to draw audiences without fail. Nothing from any other source than of Sastriar can be so satisfying in its description of Gokhale as a speaker. Let us listen to Sastriar: "He had a fine taste for English, not only for its grammar and for its idiom but for its inner and more subtle beauties. People wondered how he found time to prepare his speeches with such marvelous care. When he delivered them, though he scarcely referred to notes, he seldom hesitated or paused for words; they came readily through his speech. Although there was not anything to light up the subject matter, any flash of humour, any brilliance of wit, still he was able to keep the audience keyed up to a high pitch of expectancy, for his subject was full, his manner earnest and his style elevated."⁹ Again there is Sastriar's adequate sketch of his demeanour and appearance. "As he spoke you saw on his countenance a glow that people did not normally catch on his face. For when he sat at a public meeting he was generally glum and serious and when he began to speak, there was animation in his countenance which communicated itself to the

9. My Master Gokhale by Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri pp. 224-225.

listeners. Every word he spoke was charged with sincerity. You could see his soul as it were trying to escape through his lips." This picture is enough to impress the present generations, who have not seen Gokhale, how and why the Mahatma, himself such a soulful speaker was drawn to Gokhale as to none else of his contemporaries. It will be also pertinent in this context to say what again Sastriar has noted of Gokhale's perorations. In 1904 when Gokhale was in Madras he had to address people to make them join the Congress. After the long speech he made he wound up this :—"There is a great deal of quiet work to be done for which we want young men, who will be willing to take their instructions from their elders, willing to go among the public, without noise or fuss, not anxious to address meetings but willing and content to do quiet work. If we all recognise our respective duties in this spirit, we shall be able to turn our present efforts into a great, rousing movement for the political emancipation of this land. In the presence of such a movement all our petty personal differences will sink, all our squabbles vanish, our faith shine radiantly, sacrifices will be made to the extent they are necessary and the country will march onward, will press onwards to the realisation of that destiny of which we should dream by night and on which we should muse by day"...¹⁰ Surely the peroration is so naturally concluding the subject matter, and the audience if it had contained younger spirits, should have responded splendidly in eagerness for more of such inspiring words.

Reading the above passage one can trace the mind of Gokhale in its positive aversion to bombastic words and its sole attraction to quiet action. This trait in him was the result of early upbringing in the dutiful atmosphere of his home which received further emphasis from his discipleship to Ranade. Many are the anecdotes chronicled of the perfect relationship of a humble and devoted *chela* in Gokhale towards the benevolent master and *guru* in Rana-

10. Gokhale Speeches, Natesan & Co.

de For fourteen years he enjoyed the privilege of learning directly from Ranade and profiting by the experience and diligence of the elder. Beyond the expression "that will do" escaping from Ranade, no more assurance or appreciation could be had from him whenever the disciple performed a task assigned to him in a manner to evoke satisfaction. His editorship of the weekly Sudhanak gave him opportunities to study and write with precision upon topics ranging from history to sociology. The discipline he underwent under Ranade left such a permanent mark on his character that he was never over confident in undertaking tasks but ever followed the golden principle, inculcated in him also by study of Mill, to pursue them with a feeling of his being unequal to them in order to put forth the best in him.

It is not quite correct to preserve impressions that Gokhale and Tilak were poles apart and never saw eye to eye on any question of importance. Strong by nature, Tilak spared none who differed from him both in his speeches and in his writings in the Kesari and the Mahratta. His scholarship, experience and his seniority to Gokhale by nearly two decades, all gave him great advantage as an adversary in controversies with Gokhale whose gentleness and spirit of forbearance easily led people to imagine less of his firmness. Anyhow both were originally members of the Deccan Education Society and had enough understanding of each other not to mistake the motives of the other during differences in politics. No doubt, Tilak had some harsh things to say of Gokhale, but Gokhale never once retaliated with vehemence or offensive language. It was therefore possible for sharp differences in the methods of their approach to political problems assuming such proportions as to widen too much the gulf that separated them. Gokhale was very strong in his condemnation of Tilak's incarceration for writing articles deemed to be seditious. There were not occasions wanting to show how Tilak too entertained high opinion of Gokhale's mastery of economics and his contributions to the discussions on the councils.

Gokhale's emotional nature though always kept under restraint could not be indifferent to similar natures when brought together. One such was V Krishnaswami Ayyar of Madras for whom Gokhale entertained great affection and regard. In one of his letters to Sastriar, Gokhale had alluded to his friend Krishnaswami Ayyar's sympathetic imagination as of immense consolation to him in England. "When I was discussing the constitution with Morley and Morley made statements of somewhat depressing character and the papers were full of angry criticism, the one man who sent me consolation was Krishnaswami". As years rolled on after their coming closer in July 1904, within the space of only seven years they had learnt to understand so well each other's strength and foibles that their mutual letters bear marks of intimacy of a kind which time cannot belittle. Krishnaswami Ayyar exhorted Gokhale to take rest and inhale *Santi* spoken of in the Upanishads, and Gokhale in reply confessed that 'the time for this, however is not yet for me'.

It is said by competent critics of Gokhale that his nature, however spiritually inclined, was not willing to be tied down to any particular religious creed or caste regulation. But we have to take Gandhiji's keen interpretation of Gokhale's, as satisfying religion, for according to him, Gokhale never professed any religion but lived it. That is sufficient testimony to his ardent spirit believing in a God but never characterising Him with any personal attributes.

The capacity to make friendships was one of Gokhale's intrinsic merits. Numerous friends both among Indians and foreigners felt something very alluring in the make-up of his character. His impulsive nature to some extent was controlled by his undergoing discipline both as a Member of the Sarvajanic Sabha and the Dacca Education Society in both of which the guiding spirit was Ranade. His apparent serious look, in public, concealed a lighter side in him which on occasions revealed his sense of humour.

and sensitiveness to environment. His habit of saying 'let us bet five Rupees upon it' whenever he was contradicted in any assertion of his, used sometimes to evoke laughter from the close circle round him. It is also mentioned that Sastriar once even went to the extent of objecting strongly to this habit in Gokhale who equally persisted in saying he would reduce the amount to Rupee one, if the bet amount seemed much to Sastriar. To Srimathi Sarojini Naidu he was tender and kind and facts have come to light disclosing his general interest in all younger persons. Once when Mrs Naidu was ill and confined to bed he wrote to her questioning 'Why should the song-bird have a broken wing?' And the phrase inspired the poetess to offer a sheaf of poems, crowning it all with the title "Broken Wing"¹¹ Mrs Naidu on one occasion hastened from Lucknow to Poona to break to Gokhale the news of the Hindu-Muslim co-operation. It is said Gokhale was transported with joy and appeared thoroughly restored to health. He even mounted the steps to reach the first floor of the Society when Mrs Naidu called out "What, surely you cannot mean to mount all those steps, you are too ill" to which came his ready reply 'You have put new hope into me. I feel strong enough to face and work again'¹². Dr. Besant was another friend whose services to effect a reconciliation between the Moderates and the Extremists, though infructuous, were appreciated by Gokhale. The two parties could not come together when their ideologies and methods of approach were so totally different.

Such an emotional nature as Gokhale's could not have been alien to 'home felt pleasures.' No doubt his wife passed away in her prime, leaving two daughters. Gokhale's home was thereafter managed by his sister

11 Gokhaleana —Dr C R Reddy's speech 4.3.1920

12. Gopal Krishna Gokhale by Parvate. P. 417.

under whose care the girls were brought up. Gokhale's public activities left no doubt little time to devote himself to the duties of a parent. Still he never failed to attend on them as is clearly evidenced by the reference, in one of his letters to his friend Krishnaswami Ayyar, to his necessity to be at home to help one of his daughters appearing for the matriculation examination. Public duties were such overpowering factors with him that when a domestic claim on him tried to intervene, he was willing to sacrifice it for the sake of the other. Sastriar narrated an episode which bears out Gokhale's sense of duty overcoming his necessity to attend to his family and children. While Gokhale was staying in Madras with Sastriar in his Triplicane residence, a wire came from Poona informing him that his second daughter was very ill. Gokhale paused and turned to Sastriar, and seemed as if he was hearing his own daughter reproaching him for not having been by her bedside: "What have I known of a father's love and cares. To add poignancy to the episode the girl did not live for many years.

Gokhale's life on this earth came to an end before he completed his forty ninth year, but the enormous services he rendered to the country even from his youthful days cannot be minimised on any account. There was no aspect of life which he did not touch and which he left uninfluenced by his higher nature. If he was an editor of a journal, if he was a teacher in college, if he was an author of a mathematics treatise, if he was the Secretary of the Provincial Conference, if he was a Joint-Secretary of the Indian National Congress, if he was a delegate to represent Indian aspirations before the Parliamentary Committee in England, if he was a witness to depose evidence before a Royal Commission, if he was a social worker joining the band of selfless workers during the painful plague relief operations, if he was an unofficial ambassador of India sent to Britain to negotiate with the authorities for a favourable set of Reforms, if he was a

co-adjutor with Gandhiji in the work of securing safety and peaceful existence to the Indian settlers in South Africa, if he was an impregnable representative of the people in the Legislative councils putting up a brave fight for recognition of Indian claims for greater share in the Government, if he was a keen student of economics and public finance and able to bring to bear his knowledge on the budgetary proposals for a number of years and assist the Government in finding ways and means to improve the lot of his countrymen, if he was the first member of the Servant of India Society and sought within half a dozen years of its inception to its establishment on sound principles and practical policies, if he was a disciple of Ranade and showed his personal admiration for him in founding institutions in his name and collecting funds for them, if as an opponent in Council to the Government, he never offended any one personally, much less a chairman as Lord Curzon whose caustic tongue and self pride involved him in many an ugly situation during his long viceroyalty, if he was a good correspondent and an unfailing friend—all these and more only add to the immensity of his personality. Few and far between are the appearances in this earth men of such vision and capabilities. It is no wonder Englishmen vied with Indians to pour out their hearts in panegyrics on his death on the 19th February, 1915. "Oh! for the touch of a vanished hand, for the sound of a voice that is still" burst out Mehta. "How I wish there were a Savitri amidst us to bring back that life from the hands of Yama" bewailed Mrs. Besant.

The Servants of India Society is the monumantal memorial raised for him. Selfless workers and sober intellectuals have carried on the work of Gokhale despite the great changes in the political field that have happened during the half-a-century¹³ after Gokhale's death. But the

13. This article was written in 1966 during the Gokhale centenary.

lines chalked out by him and the standard of service expected by him are still observed scrupulously. In being a perfect servant of India he aimed at what he had often in his younger days listened to an **abhang** of Tukaram, which his beloved master daily recited and whose meaning is the following :—

“He who befriends the affected and the persecuted—he is a true saint; and God Himself is to be found there ” 14

14. Gopal Krishna Gokhale by Parvate p, 7.
