

## **Pune's Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics turns 90!**

**By Ram Upendra Das**

Written by Guest

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In the age of WhatsApp groups, it was one of the most pleasant surprises to receive this morning a newspaper clipping in Marathi telling us that the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (GIPE), Pune turns 90 today, i.e. 6 June 2020. I had the honour to have done my MA in Economics during 1986-1988. Most importantly, along with other classmates / batchmates I was amongst a noted few who passed out

with Grade A, a feat not achieved by many. I found a humble place in the galaxy of GIPE alumni!

The website of the Institute suggests, “Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune, established in 1930 by the Servants of India Society, is the oldest research and training institute in Economics in the country. It is dedicated to research into the socio-economic dimensions of the Indian society, and carries forward the legacy of Gopal Krishna Gokhale who founded the Servants of India Society in 1905 with a view to promote education and develop capabilities among Indians for the governance of the nation after it had attained its political independence. The Institute is registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, and the Bombay Public Trusts Act, 1950. Over the decades, the Institute has established strong credentials in empirical and analytical research. In recognition of its contribution to higher learning and research in Economics, the Institute was awarded the status of institution Deemed to be University, in 1993.”

I swell with pride. I remember walking into GIPE and reading the banner ‘Servants of India Society’. The tests with tribulations; sweat of struggles; gasping while gasping – that our economics course presented to us made me walking out of the campus two years later with the Talisman of Mahatma Gandhi that I am going to serve with my knowledge the common man and that I am going to keep learning about economics and life, always!

Actually, there is a cottage in the campus where Gandhi met Gokhale for the first time and that unleashed his journey of India’s freedom struggle. We tend to imagine what value system and moral sentiments would have been sown then that blossomed in a way that it has stood the tests of time and space. The world needs to cling on to those afresh and on an urgent basis.

The complex concepts of economics; situated in intricate contexts of political economy; compounded by still evolving Weltanschauung for a young student from Gorakhpur, provided a heady mix to fathom. It went to another level when it got juxtaposed with your quest for knowledge in the realms of spirituality from ancient, medieval and modern literature of the Indian subcontinent origin; interspersed with Freudian defaults and human faults; only to get rescued from Gestalt. And in this Goswami Tulsidas provided what was life-like and life-giving at the same time. This was the time when Mirza Ghalib and Beatles started making sense because one could get into the meaning and the melody inherent.

The Sawai Gandharva Festival of music in Pune and our encounters with Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, U. Srinivas, Zakir Hussain, Shiv Kumar Sharma and so on shaped and refined our sensibilities only to be shattered by a rock concert with loud music. But the loudness helped understand the nuances of paradigms, price-determination, public finance and the pain. The cricket, the badminton, the movies, the meanderings and the food; made the studies softer. At times we used to sleep hungry only to get up with the hunger to go to our professors' classes. But we also skipped lunches to study and bunked classes not to study!

From hostel to GIPE Tapri (tiny tea-stall) to classroom to tapri to classroom to tapri to library to tapri to classroom to hostel to tapri to classroom to tapri to hostel to late-night café to hostel to again tapri the next day.....we were students of economics, friends and co-travelers; some of us spoke too much, some little and some usually remained silent. Some sang. Some walked together at night breathing Pune air and Pune.

Exists Tapri / today in time

And no longer / stands in space

Emotions galore / and sublime

Without us / a wearisome place!

The internal exams called tutorials were a weekly feature and the end-semester exams that were called externals shaped our days and nights. Very difficult, so cloudy, mind-boggling...the adjectives fall short of defining them, the metaphors can but be only incomplete, yet it was because of our teachers that we could sail through, enabled by our classmates always sharing their class-notes and their understanding; the hostlers and day-scholars alike as much as our seniors' and juniors' help!

The GIPE, through its erudite scholars, professors and faculty, has left an indelible mark on the economic policy making processes of India and abroad. Our Professors have shaped the lives and livelihoods of their students by providing the instruments of thinking, and thinking about the correct things. We remember them always with gratitude and immense respect!

Today, at the Centre for Regional Trade of the Commerce Ministry of the Government of India, an autonomous institution which I head, GIPE spirit lives on

with some GIPE pass-outs working as our researchers and some interns that are still studying at GIPE.

I revert to the core of ‘Servants of India Society’ and carry on our work as per John Milton’s On His Blindness: ‘They also serve who only stand and wait’!!!

(The author is Head and Professor, Centre for Regional Trade, New Delhi. Views are personal).

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