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ON
DIAMOND OF INDIA AND JEWEL OF
MAHARASHTRA- GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE
(9th May 1866 – 19th Feb. 1915)

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GOOD MORNING. RESPECTED MEMBERS ON THE DAIS, DELEGATES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FIRSTLY, LET ME CONGRATULATE THE KAGAL EDUCATION SOCIETY'S D.R.MANE MAHAVIDYALAYA AND ALL THOSE DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY INVOLVED IN ORGANISING THIS 'NATIONAL SEMINAR ON DIAMOND OF INDIA AND JEWEL OF MAHARASHTRA: GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE (9TH MAY 1866 - 19TH FEBRUARY 1915)'. THIS INSTITUTION LOCATED IN KAGAL, THE PLACE WITH WHICH GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE (HEREAFTER GOKHALE) WAS ALSO ASSOCIATED AS A SCHOOL STUDENT IS THE RIGHT VENUE FOR A SEMINAR ON HIM. FURTHER THE SEMINAR IS HELD TO COMMEMORATE THE DEATH CENTENARY OF GOKHALE, AND TO REVISIT AND RECONSTRUCT THE MANIFOLD DIMENSIONS OF THE HISTORY RELATED TO HIM. THIS IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

I AM FULLY AWARE OF MY LIMITATIONS TO PERFORM THE GREAT TASK OF DELIVERING KEYNOTE ADDRESS AS I HAVE NOT SPECIALISED ON GOKHALE, BUT ONLY HAVE SOME READING IN MODERN INDIAN HISTORY. THAT I AM SERVING AT GOA UNIVERSITY OUTSIDE MAHARASHTRA, BUT IN THE CLOSE VICINITY, MAY HAVE
prompted you for inviting me over here. However, I am overwhelmed by
the generosity bestowed on me by you all, particularly by my well-wishers
at Kolhapur. Also, this challenge provided me an opportunity to read and
learn more about Gokhale, and appreciate the myriad aspects of his life and
works.

**Historiography of Indian National Movement:**

Before I begin to tell anything on Gokhale, let me briefly recollect the
manner in which historiography of modern India has been growing from
the nineteenth century onwards, and particularly after India’s
independence. The imperial or colonial historical writings castigated Indian
national movement, its organisations and leaders. The nationalist writings
which emerged as a reaction to the colonial writings, no doubt reacted
sharply to colonial views, but exaggerated India’s achievements,
particularly invoking India’s ancient history and culture. Both these types
concentrated more on elitist historiography. The Marxist historiography
followed material interpretation, and broke new grounds in this field
particularly after independence. This intervention was a welcome change
and it brought new areas into history, particularly the industrial and
agricultural proletariat and the class struggle into the arena of Indian
history. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the Cambridge scholars applied
themselves to Indian history, and contributed immensely to understand the
history of national movement. It failed to recognise the contradiction
between colonialism and nationalism. Self-interest of the Indian leaders,
factional politics and patron-client relations, etc, were highlighted by them.
In fact, they revived the colonial approach in a new form as the Marxist
interpretation was an anathema to them. (Bipan Chandra *et al.*, 1990:17-22;
Asian history and culture. This group led by Ranajit Guha aimed at the de-
elitisation of history, and their objective was to reconstruct ‘history from
below’. (Ranajit Guha, 2008:vii-viii and 1-8) Subsequently, history writing
has evolved more and more interdisciplinary in its approach. The use of the
auxiliary subjects has been emphasised upon in historical analysis. The use
of traditional sources, say archival, with non-archival sources like folklore,
field study, and interviews to find out “the small voices of history” have
been emphasised. (Ranajit Guha, 2008:1-12) All these approaches have enriched the history of the Indian national movement, and made its study more meaningful and challenging.

A study of Gokhale has to be contextualised in this rich corpus of Indian historical writings. Otherwise, the study of a tall nationalist leader like Gokhale would be hagiographic in nature. It would be like following the great man theory of history of Thomas Carlyle, to whom “the history of the world is but the biography of great men”. This would lead us to hero worship, which Gokhale himself abhorred.

Gokhale – Early Life and Education:

Gokhale hailed from the Kothluk village, Guhagar taluk, Ratnagiri district of the western coast of India, a traditional nursery of Maharashtra’s patriots. He belonged to a Chitpavan Brahmin family which was economically poor. Gokhale started his life without the advantage of birth or fortune. Gokhale received his primary vernacular education at Kagal and was sent to Kolhapur to continue studies at the Rajaram High School from where he passed the matriculation examination in 1881. Later on he successfully got through the Previous in 1882 from Rajaram College, Kolhapur; his first B.A. in 1883 from Deccan College, Poona, and then Rajaram College, Kolhapur, and, joined for his final B.A. in 1884 at Elphinstone College, Bombay. He learnt English literature, and passed with Mathematics as optional. He was much influenced by the writings of theorists like J.S. Mill and Edmund Burke. At the end of 1885 Gokhale passed the first examination in Law at Bombay University, but a sudden and unexpected development altered the course of his life. He had thoughts of studying engineering and even appearing for ICS examination. (B.R.Nanda:2006; 3-8; Speeches and Writings, Vol.I, 1987: 3-4) All these could not materialise due to the lack of economic and family support. He first worked in the New English School in Poona, and later on in Fergusson College, Poona. Gokhale was elected to the Senate of the University of Bombay in 1895, and continued as a member till his death. (D.B.Mathur, 1966:16) Gokhale was appointed Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (CIE) in 1904, a formal recognition by the Empire of his service. In his autobiography, M.K.Gandhi called Gokhale as his mentor and guide.
Gokhale was not fortunate to have much support from his parents as also his wives. His father died when he was just thirteen, and a few years later his mother also died. His first wife, Savitribai was sick. He had two daughters and a son from his second wife, Radhabai. Radhabai died soon after giving birth to her son in the year 1899. The son also did not survive. Gokhale’s health was also falling towards the end of his career and he died young at the age of 48. (D.B.Mathur, 1966:457-458; D.G.Karve and D.V.Ambekar, *Speeches*, Vol.II,1966: pages between xlix and li)

**Writings on Gopal Krishna Gokhale:**


**Speeches and Writings of Gokhale:**

Apart from the writings on Gokhale, quite a few institutions and public utility spaces have also immortalised his name. Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune; Gokhale Institute of Public Affairs, Bangalore; Gokhale Memorial Girl’s College, Kolkata; Gokhale Centenary College, Ankola; G.K. Gokhale College, Kolhapur; Gokhale Road, Mumbai; Gokhale Hostel (of Motilal Vidyamandir), Bhopal; and Gokhale Hall in Chennai may be mentioned. Besides, the Gokhale Education Society, established by T. A. Kulkarni, runs more than 50 educational institutions in places like Nashik, Mumbai, Konkan and other places.

Gokhale’s ideas on nationalism, liberalism, secularism, civil liberty, theory of drain of wealth, female education, compulsory primary education, industrialisation, self-government, social welfare measures and his selfless contribution to the national cause need our attention. They are still relevant today particularly when our politics and a few social groups are ridden by communal ideologies (both Hindu and Muslim) which affect secularism, peace and harmony in the society, national cohesion and progress.

Also, there could be some unused, and newly found source materials, either in India or abroad, which need to be studied and the new history or new interpretation thus arrived at needs to be incorporated into the existing corpus of knowledge on Gokhale, as there is no end in history.

Struggle About/Against Colonialism:

Bipan Chandra, an eminent historian of modern India, has pointed out that the Indian nationalist or anti-imperialist struggle is a struggle about colonialism before it became a struggle against colonialism. The founding fathers of the Indian National Congress carried out this struggle about colonialism in a brilliant fashion, (Bipan Chandra et.al., 1990:79) and Gokhale also participated in it very brilliantly and successfully. He became a member of the Congress in 1889, as a protege of the social reformer, M.G. Ranade. Ranade’s influence on the development of Gokhale’s life and ideas can hardly be exaggerated. (Wolpert, 1989:39) Gokhale considered himself as “a very humble pupil of Ranade”. As Gokhale was much junior compared to the other leaders of the Congress at that time, it is apt to
consider Gokhale as the “Grand Young Man” of Indian nationalism. (D.E.Wacha to Gokhale quoted in Gordon Johnson, 1973:131)

**Gokhale and the Indian National Congress:**

Gokhale joined the Indian National Congress in 1889. Except during 1897-1904, a period of ‘resignation’ due to the ‘Apology Incident’, he served actively to activise the Organisation. He worked to transform the Congress into a forum recognised by the British colonial government and trusted by the people.

Gokhale was in the first Bombay Provincial Conference of the Congress, and when the Conference met in 1888, he was elected its Joint Secretary. In the second conference in May 1889, he moved the resolution against reduction of government expenditure on education, and in so doing expressed his overriding faith in Western learning as a liberating force for India. (Wolpert,1989:44) Gokhale was one of the Secretaries of the Bombay Provincial Congress for 1901,1902 and 1903 when he was entrusted with the organisational matters in the Congress. From 1903 to 1906, he was Additional Joint General Secretary. In 1904, he was appointed to the Constitution-Committee to look into the question of the constitution of the Congress. Similarly, he held several other responsible positions in the Congress and finally, presided over the 21st session of the Congress, held at Benaras from 27th to 30th December, 1905. Till then he was the youngest leader to be elected to that exalted position. (D.B.Mathur, 1966:292)

After 1905, through the Surat split -1907, he came to be identified as one of the leading advocates of the ‘moderate’ politics in India. As a Congress leader, he vehemently argued for constitutional reforms, civil liberties, Indianisation of services, reduction of salt duty, swadeshism, and for the progress of India. He had expressed his views at the time of the partition of Bengal, drafting of the Morley-Minto Scheme and also on the issues of minority representation and provincial autonomy.

**Gokhale’s Visits to London:**

Gokhale’s first visit to London was in 1897 in connection with the evidence before the Welby Commission, or the Royal Commission appointed to consider the state of Indian finance. He was representative of the Deccan Sabha. The Commissioners royal orders limited its inquiry to
three major topics: machinery of control over Indian expenditure, progress of expenditure and appointment of charges between England and India. Here Gokhale managed to introduce much of his political, moral, as well as his economic philosophy. (Wolpert, 1989:110) He could establish that the British rule had enslaved the soul of India. The irony of un-British rule in India was exposed. The second visit was in 1905, in the capacity of a representative of Indian National Congress. The third visit in 1906 was when Gokhale was the Congress President. The fourth visit in 1908 was to present the position of the Bombay Presidency Association before the government in helping them to formulate the projected constitutional reforms. The fifth visit in 1912 was to foster cause of elementary education in India. The sixth and seventh visits, 1913 and 1914 were in connection with his membership of the Public Services Commission, during 1913 and 1914. (D.B.Mathur, 1966:84-105)

**Deccan Education Society:**

In the year 1884, the Deccan Education Society was formed. In 1886, Gokhale was admitted to the Society as a life-member. Gokhale came to be recognized as the chief spokesman of the Society. In 1887, G. G. Agarkar and Gokhale sought to raise their monthly salary by Rupees 5/-. Again in 1887, Gokhale due to financial constraints, sought loan from the Deccan Education Society. Both these moves were opposed by Tilak, and thus the colleagues were in conflict. In 1888, Holkar of Indore gave a purse of Rs.700/-, again there was dispute over it. On questions of the working, organisation and ideals of the Society, Tilak and Gokhale differed fundamentally. Tilak finally resigned from the Deccan Education Society in December 1890. (Wolpert, 1989:28 and 32; D.B.Mathur, 1966: 9-10)

**Gokhale and Poona Sarvajanik Sabha:**

Gokhale formally joined the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha in 1889, and revived the Sabha into a foremost provincial political association of British India. (Wolpert, 1989:12) This was due to his dedicated political work, attractive personality, youth, self-sacrifice and devotion to full-time public work. (Sumit Sarkar, 1983:95) This would have played host to the Indian National Congress in 1885 but for the cholera in Poona. However, Gokhale
never returned to the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha after the 1895 Congress ended.

In 1896 a new society called the Deccan Sabha was founded by Ranade, Gokhale and their liberal allies. B.G. Tilak criticised Gokhale for this act. (Wolpert, 1989:76-77)

**Simultaneous examination:**

The Public Service Commission, created in 1886 was against the holding of simultaneous open competitive public service examinations in India and England and this was reported in 1892. Gokhale joined in this struggle for political and economic equality of opportunity. He proposed a resolution denouncing the Commission's report at the Allahabad Congress of 1892. In the following year, the House of Commons took up the matter, passing a resolution in June of 1893 advising the holding of simultaneous examinations. However, this was sabotaged by the Whitehall after strenuous objections from Calcutta. (Wolpert, 1989:106)

**Female Education:**

Gokhale's paper on "Female Education in India", read before the Women's Section on Education at the Victorian Era Exhibition in London in 1897, showed him to be an ardent advocate of female education in all its branches. To him, in India it assumed additional importance by reason of the bondage of caste and custom which tie down the people to certain fixed ways of life and fixed modes of thought. He said that a combination of "enforced ignorance and overdone religion" had made Indian women at once the foremost victims and the strongest defenders of the status quo, and in their education he saw "the only means of emancipating their minds from this degrading thraldom to ideas inherited through a long past". (Wolpert, 1989:36-37)

**Gokhale on Industrialisation:**

As professor of political economy as well as English at Fergusson College, Gokhale impressed upon his students the need for protection of infant industries in underdeveloped India. In fact Gokhale was one of the earliest advocates of industrialisation. As early as 1890, Gokhale wrote in *Sudharak* that "It is sad irony of fate that this far-famed country of wealth and plenty should, in spite of her geographical magnificence and the
fertility of her soil, suffer from a disastrous revolution in her great economic forces. They are at present flowing against her with a tidal sweep, and if no prudential measures come to her salvation, the Golden Chersonese (Suvarna dvipa or golden land) is doomed to succumb, “never to rise again”. (Wolpert, 1989:103)

Gokhale was one of the advocates of the theory of drain of wealth from India (colony/periphery) to Britain (metropolis/core) which ultimately contributed to the impoverishment of India. (Bipan Chandra, 1982:636-708; D.G.Karve and D.V.Ambekar, Speeches, Vol.II, 1966: 223-235)

**Gokhale and Press:**

Gokhale and Agarkar started their own Anglo-Marathi (bi-lingual) newspaper as a reformist counterpoise to Tilak’s Kesari and Mahratta. They named their new weekly as Sudharak (The Reformer). Gokhale editing its English section, and Agarkar handled the Marathi half till his death in 1895. By 1898, Gokhale was no longer one of its editors. (Wolpert,1989:39 and 316)

**The ‘Apology Incident’:**

This incident, which was the result of the views expressed by Gokhale in London, on the work of the Plague Relief Committee and the British treatment of Indians during the relief operations in and around Bombay and Poona in 1896-1897, deeply perturbed Gokhale for sometime but, it had taught him a great lesson. Gokhale’s biographer J. S. Hoyland has said: “This incident had a decided effect upon Gokhale’s character... He learnt to judge questions on their merits ... irrespective of what public opinion might or might not say...He became self-reliant, perhaps more reserved... more cautious and prudent”. (D.B.Mathur, 1966:32)

**The Age of Consent Bill:**

In 1891-92, to curb child marriage, there was a proposal to raise the age of consent from 10 to 12. Thus the Age of Consent Bill was introduced by the Imperial government. This was greatly supported by Gokhale. It became a law in the Bombay Presidency. (Wolpert,1989:54-60)

**Gandhi, Gokhale and Tilak:**

M.K.Gandhi first met Gokhale at Poona in 1896 where he had gone to seek support for the Natal Indian Congress. “It was like meeting an old
friend", the Mahatma recalled, "or better still, a mother after a long separation". (Wolpert, 1989:143) It was really a case of love at first sight. Gandhi compared Tilak to the ocean, and Gokhale to the Ganges. (Wolpert, 1989:26) Stanley A. Wolpert has rightly stated that with the emergence of these two leaders, Tilak and Gokhale, there was the dawn of a new era in Maharashtra.

**Gokhale and Poona Municipality:**

Gokhale was a member of the Poona Municipality’s General Committee since 1899, and President of the Municipal Corporation from 1902 to 1906. During these years, he sponsored hygienic measures, induced central government to provide funds for such reforms. (Wolpert, 1989: p.140)

**Gokhale and South Africa:**

In 1912, leaving England, Gokhale went to South Africa (October and November 1912) and embarked on a 26 day tour of the beleaguered Indian communities throughout the Union, along with M.K. Gandhi. (Wolpert, 1989: 252-253) This enabled him to have a firsthand experience of the wretched condition of the Indian settlers there.

**Gokhale and Bombay Legislative Council (1899-1901):**


In 1901, when a Bill was brought in the Bombay Legislative Council to take away the peasants right of ownership of land to prevent him from bartering it away because of his thriftlessness. This bill was opposed by Pherozeshah Mehta and Gokhale, and both supported the peasants, and defended their right of ownership of land. When the Government insisted on using its official majority to push through the Bill, Mehta along with Gokhale and three others took the unprecedented step of organising the first walk-out in India’s legislative history. (Bipan Chandra et.al., 1990,120)
Imperial Legislative Council (1901-1915):

Gokhale took his seat in the Imperial Legislative Council as additional member in December 1901. Gokhale’s first budget debate address in 1902 called for three-way tax reduction: in the salt duty, the income tax, and abolition of the cotton-goods excise, to stimulate indigenous industry. (Wolpert, 1989: 144) He vociferously argued that the surplus budget presented by Edward Law for British India illustrated the utter absence of a due correspondence between the condition of the country, and the condition of the finances of the country. He emphasised that the surplus coming in times of serious depression and suffering, constituted “a wrong to the community”. The keynote of his speech and argument was the poverty of the people of British India. He argued that the material condition of the mass of the people was “steadily deteriorating”, and that the phenomenon was “the saddest in the whole range of the economic history of the world”. This budget speech had an “electrifying effect” upon the people. As his biographer, B.R.Nanda, has put it: “Like Byron, he could have said that he woke up one fine morning and found himself famous”. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, which had missed no opportunity earlier to criticise Gokhale, gave unstinted expression to his pride and acknowledged that he had the requisite courage and ability to expose the fallacies of the British government in India in an uncompromising manner. (Bipan Chandra et.al., 1989:121-122; R.P.Patwardhan and D.V.Ambekar, Vol.I, 1962: 1-27) Gokhale owed much to M. G. Ranade and G.V. Joshi for his ideas on Indian economics.

During the next ten years, Gokhale critically analysed the annual budgets and other legislations of the government and expressed his views with a mixture of courage, tenacity and ability. He highlighted the misery and poverty of the peasants, drain of wealth from India, the government neglect of industrial development, the taxation of the poor, lack of welfare measures like primary education, health and medical facilities, the suppression of civil liberties, enslavement of Indian labourers in British colonies, the moral dwarfing of Indians, the underdevelopment of Indian economy and the complete neglect and subordination of Indian interests by the colonial rulers. In fact Gokhale transformed the Legislative Council into
an open university for imparting political education to the people. Gokhale was one of the most ardent advocates of Indianisation of the Services. He wanted more number of Indians to be employed in the higher branches of Public Service of their own country. He pleaded for making Municipal Boards and Local Boards purely non-official bodies. The most important non-fiscal legislation in this period dealt with the reorganisation of the universities of British India - The Indian Universities Act-1904, and the Amendment of the Official Secrets Act - 1889. Gokhale led the Council opposition to both these unpopular measures. (Bipan Chandra et al., 1990:121-122; D.B.Mathur, 1966:208-243; R.P.Patwardhan and D.V.Ambekar, Vol.I, 1962: 28-263) In 1905, Gokhale demanded self-government. (Bipan Chandra et al., 1990:105)

It should be remembered that the first bill to make primary education compulsory, and free for families earning less than Rupees 10/- a month, was moved in the Imperial Legislative Council by Gokhale in 1911, and was rejected by the official majority. The Bombay Governor in a private letter to the Viceroy stated the real reason: "nationalist power to stir up discontent would be immensely increased if every cultivator could read". (Sumit Sarkar, 1983: 67)

Servants of India Society:

Gokhale had the zeal to set up a band of self-less public servants dedicated to but one end and ideal in life: the welfare of the people and service of the country. His quest for spiritualisation of public life led him to the founding of The Servants of India Society in 1905. It was meant to be a restatement of Gokhale's concern for India's political, economic, social and educational welfare. The Society was intended to be a training ground for zealous workers devoted to national service, with missionary moorings. (D.B.Mathur, 1966:57-58)

Conclusion:

Gokhale was one of the most liberal, dedicated and sincere nationalist leader. His ideas of nationalism, secularism, liberalism and commitment to the nation are still relevant in India. An issue like separate communal electorate for Muslims is sometimes upheld to criticise him, but it was done to accommodate the interest of the minorities, and in this
context M.K.Gandhi said that even wise men make mistakes. However, this should not diminish the importance of Gokhale as a tall leader and one who has sacrificed his all to the well-being of the country. Gokhale was syncretic; he had catholic aspirations and evolutionary inclination. It was the triumph of secularism when Gokhale supported special representation of the minorities in the legislature. As a unifier and nation-builder, he was convinced that in India, secularism ought to be accepted as one of the main planks of conciliation, peace and progress. M.K.Gandhi described Gokhale "as pure as crystal, gentle as lamb, brave as a lion and chivalrous to a fault and the most perfect man in the political field". M.A.Jinnah said that he aspired to become the "Muslim Gokhale". Gokhale’s method of politics and fighting within the four walls of the law was only possible and practicable under the British rule which was dictatorial in nature. In fact the early Indian nationalists comprehended the nature of British colonialism correctly, and reacted accordingly. And in this, G.K.Gokhale also played a leading role from the late 1880s to 1915.

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