

Gopal Krishna Gokhale - A Liberal Thinker

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Abstract

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was prominent leader of Indian Independence Movement. He was one of the political and social leaders during the Freedom Struggle of India. Gokhale's political thought revolves around the socio-political issues. He appreciated and welcomed the British rule in India. He was essentially a liberal thinker and preferred constitutional methods for attaining the goal of self government. He supported the idea of strengthening local self government institutions. Gokhale gave more importance to national unity and considered it as the first pre-requisite for the growth and development of Indian nationalism. He also stood for the principle of racial equality and expressed strong resentment against the policy of racial discrimination being pursued by the English. He was favoring in establishing a state based on western ideas. Thus he laid emphasis on the principles of individual liberty and social equality. Gokhale favoured the Swadeshi movement. Now a days, we see the relevance of his political ideas. I, M.VENKATACHALAPATHY, Research Scholar of Sri Krishnadevaraya University (Anantapur), wrote this paper and explain the political ideas of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

1. Introduction

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was born on 9 May 1866 in Kothluk village of Guhagar taluk in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra in India. His parents Krishna Rao and Valubai. He was belonged to a Brahman family. Gokhale studied early education at Rajaram High School in Kothapur. And later, he moved to Bombay to higher education. After completion of his graduation at the Elphinstone College (Bombay), Gokhale joined as professor of history and political economy at the Fergusson College, Poona. He remained on the staff, finally as principal, until 1902. Becoming actively identified with the National Congress movement, he was for some years the joint secretary. and in 1905 president at the Benares session. The higher education made Gokhale understand the importance of liberty, democracy and parliamentary system of the government. The years of hard work and devotion of Gopal Krishna Gokhale did immense contribution to the country. But, unfortunately, excessive exertion and the resulting exhaustion only aggravated his diabetes and cardiac asthma. The end came peacefully, on February 19, 1915, the great leader passed away.

2. Contribution to Nation

Gokhale was one of the founding political leaders during the Indian Freedom Movement against the British Empire. He regarded as political Guru of Mahatma Gandhi. His education tremendously influenced the course of his future career. In addition to learning English, he was exposed to Western political thought. The most profound influence on Gokhale was exercised by Mahadev Govind Ranade. Ranade also fully realized the potentialities of Gokhale and imparted him rigorous training which greatly contributed to the latter's success as a statesman. He also made him one of the Secretaries of the Sarvajanik Sabha of Poona, a prominent political institution of India. He became a member of Indian Legislative Council in 1902. Gokhale became a member of the Indian National Congress in 1889. After Congress was split into two groups- moderates and extremist, he tried his best to unite them. He was of the view that it will be difficult to achieve independence without the unity of it. Another notable accomplishment of Gokhale was the establishment of the Servants of India Society at Poona in 1905. The core aim of it was to give politically educate and training to youth of the country. It taught the youngsters to dedicate themselves to the service of the country. Thousands of boys and girls became a members of this society. This Article tries to focus Political ideas of G.K.Gokhale and Relevance of his political ideas in present days.

3. Political Ideas :

Gokhale's political ideas revolves more around the socio-political issues. The political thoughts of Gokhale are as follows...

Trust in the English conscience

Like most of the liberal Indian thinkers of his time Gokhale appreciated and welcomed the British rule in India. He had trust in the English conscience. He supported the British rule for two reasons. Firstly like all the moderates, Gokhale was convinced that it was because of British Rule that the process of modernization of the Indian society had set in. Secondly, the British upheld the concept of equality before the law. They introduced

the principle of representative government and guaranteed freedom of speech and press. Gokhale was convinced that if British Rule continued for sometimes, India would be modernized completely. He also believed that in keeping with their traditions, the British would fulfill their pledges and bestow on India-self government once Indians qualified for the same. Gokhale's faith in the British sense of justice does not imply that he was their blind admirer. He bitterly criticized the policies of the British government on a number of issues. He condemned the British for keeping the Indians out of high position despite their professions of equal treatment to all. He also opposed the partitioned of Bengal.

Faith in individual liberty

Gokhale was essentially a liberal thinker. But his liberalism was slightly different from the classical liberalism that existed in the 18th and 19th century. As a liberal Gokhale stood for individual liberty and certain basic rights which the people should enjoy. He felt that individual

liberty could be usefully allowed only when individual behave with a sense of self-restraint. To him the right of free expression and freedom of the press were essential to realize the ideal of individual liberty. He therefore, opposed the Official Secret Bill in 1904. Gokhale also supported the right to private property and freedom of contract. In order to maintain individual liberty and essential civil rights, he proposed the establishment of the representative institution in the country. Gokhale did not demand universal franchise. For e.g. for the village Panchayat election he wanted that only such person should be enfranchised who paid a minimum land revenue. Gokhale also suggested the principle of special representation for the religious minority. Recognizing the communal differences between the Hindus and Muslims, he pleaded for separate representation of the Muslims. Gokhale's ideas regarding the role of state remarkably differed from that of classical liberalism. Classical liberalism stands for a laissez-faire state. But, Gokhale wanted state intervention to regulate the economic and social life of the country.

Method of Struggle

Gokhale preferred constitutional methods for attaining the goal of self government. He argued that the chief merits of constitutional method were that it involved a minimum of disturbances in the existing arrangement and would help in winning the support of the freedom loving people of England. Gokhale's constitutional method includes passive resistance, nonpayment of taxes etc. avoiding violence, rebellion and abetting of foreign invasion.

Support to Local Self Government

Gokhale strongly favoured the idea of strengthening local self government institutions. He stood for decentralization of authority. He felt that it was through this gradual decentralization and by way of forming an Advisory District Council for advising the District administration that India could progress. Gokhale while giving evidence to the Hob house Decentralization Commission pleaded for the system of village Panchayat and District Council for the smooth running of Indian Administration. By self government he never meant complete independence for India. He wanted self government only within the limits of the British Empire.

National Unity

Gokhale gave more importance to national unity and considered it as the first prerequisite for the growth and development of Indian nationalism. He tried to blind the people of different parts to a single unit by eliminating caste and creed considerations. He was also a strong advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity and asserted that there could not be any future of India without the cooperation of these two communities.

Principle of Racial Equality

He also stood for the principle of racial equality and expressed strong resentment against the policy of racial discrimination being pursued by the English. He was particularly critical of the treatment meted out to the Indian labourers sent for work to foreign lands. In March 1912, he moved a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council recommending prohibition of recruitment of Indian indentured labour.

Faith in the Western Principles

He was interested in building a state based on western ideas. He thus laid emphasis on the principles of individual liberty and social equality. Gokhale did not favour reconstruction of Hindu society on the basis of past. Instead he favoured reconstruction according to the western modern ideas so that the people could claim equality. Support for Swadeshi: Gokhale supported the Swadeshi movement. To him Swadeshi meant an exalted, deep and all-embracing love India. Like Ranade, he felt that the key-problem in India was that of production which involved the utilization of capital and entrepreneurship. India was deficient in these fields and hence anyone who contributed to these aspects was working towards Swadeshim.

The primacy of Means

Like Gandhi, Gokhale also believed in the primacy of means. He insisted on the spiritualization of politics and wanted to use it as a means for serving the people. He laid more emphasis on building up of character and asserted that a nation must deserve liberty before it puts forward the demand for the same. Gokhale laid emphasis on the need of raising the moral and social standards of the people to fully involve them in the national movement.

4. Relevance of Gokhale's Idea

Now a days, we see the relevance of Gokhale's political ideas. Gokhale wanted that the state should do for the welfare of the people. According to the Directive Principle of State Policy of the Indian Constitution India is a welfare State. The Constitution of India under Article 19 guarantees the six Fundamental Rights for the protection of individual rights for the protection of individual liberty. Article 21 also gives the right to life and personal liberty and this is must for the development of human quality. Decentralization of power is needed for strengthening of democracy and for development. Realizing the needs of it, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 has provided provision for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the Panchayat's to both preparations of economic plans for development and social justice.

5. Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that Gokhale was a prominent political liberal thinker. He contributed a lot of service to Indian politics. He also stood for the introduction of moral values in politics and his life. He also advocated moderation, reason and compromise as political technique.

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