

Indian Political Thought

(Gopal Krishna Gokhale)

For
B.A. (Pol.Sc.(Hons.)
Degree Part-I, Paper-I

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His Life and Times

- Born in a middle class family in Ratnagiri district of modern Maharashtra on May 9, 1866.
- A visionary statesman and articulate political thinker
- Disciple of M G Ranade from 1887-1901
- A practitioner of Moderate kind of Politics and stood for constitutional method of political agitation.
- He became the President of Indian National Congress in 1905.
- He edited some of the popular journal of his time and that included *sudharak* and *Journal of Sarvajanik Sabha*.

His contributions

- He established Servants of India Society in 1905 so that educated young men could be trained for the public services and can also be taught the virtue of self-sacrifice.
- Took keen interest in the issues and problems of Labour and at the request of Mahatma Gandhi, Gokhale visited South Africa in 1912 to raise the problems of Indians Settled there.
- Just after the return from Africa, Gokhale became severe ill and died in the year 1915.

Gokhale as Political Thinker

- Gokhale was not a political thinker in strict sense of term as we use for Plato, Aristotle, Locke etc.
- He did not any political commentaries or work as like Tilak's 'Geeta Rahasya' or Gandhi's 'Hind Swaraj'.
- What he wrote as an articles became the only reference to draw his political ideas.
- He made a several reference on socio-economic issues or even the burning issues of the time. His political thought revolves more around the socio-economic issues.
- Thus he could be assessed around his views on freedom, nationalism and political programme.

Concept of Freedom

- He was in favour of independence as a long term goal but could not be pursued as their immediate goal.
- He wanted to first get rid of evil social practices before seeking liberation from the Britishers. As a matter of fact he disagreed with Tilak, who opposed the “Age of Consent Bill” and he supported it as a good gesture from the Britishers.
- He believed that a free nation consists of free individuals who are guided by an enlightened conscience and not attached to irrational dogmas and superstitions. Thus the new liberation movement should begin as “new life movement”.

Idea of Nationalism

- Gokhale's view of nationalism is likened as moral regeneration of the nation.
- A true nationalist should strive for moral uplift of the masses and as well the emancipation of downtrodden.
- Servants of India Society was founded to secure these goals and it aimed at securing self-government on the line of British Dominion.
- He believed that British rule will bring about the desired social reforms.
- He extended full support to Swadeshi movement but not as total boycott.

Nationalism...

- According to Gokhale the Swadeshi movement is both patriotic and an economic movement. He asserts that “...the idea of swadeshi is one of the noblest conceptions that have ever stirred the hearts of humanity...But the movement on its material side is an economic one..to ensure a ready consumption of such articles as are produced in the country”.

Gokhale on liberalism

- He had immense faith in British liberalism. He indeed supported the state role in the sphere of economy to be similar as espoused by the British philosopher. Therefore he supported both Swadeshi as well as British product.
- He cherished the ideal of *individual liberty* not as total absence of restraint rather with a sense of self-restraint and self organization.
- He favoured the right to private property and freedom of contract.
- In his view the arch of Liberal doctrine is constitutive of right to private property, individual liberty and freedom of contract.
- He favoured the growth of representative institutions in India by the Britishers to promote a representative democracy.

Gokhale as liberal

- He pleaded for the representation of various interests and also in favour of separate representation for the religious minority.
- Recognizing the communal difference between Hindus and Muslims, Gokhale pleaded for separate representation for Muslims. Here Mahatma Gandhi differed with his political Guru as he opposed steadfastly any kind of communal representation.
- In the realm of state, Gokhale was in favour of state intervention to regulate the economic and social life of the country. Gokhale said ***“Indians needed a government which subordinates all other considerations to the welfare of Indian people...and endeavors by all means in its power to further the moral and material interests of the people in and outside India.”***

Political Programme

His goals and programme revolved around four core ideas and which are:

- I. Securing a larger share of representation of Indians into mainstream representative institutions;
- II. Proposal of reforms including the separation of judicial from executive as mainstay of rule of law;
- III. Financial rearrangements in order to secure the best utilization of scarce resources and he favoured the reduction of military charges and moderation of land assessment; and
- IV. Continuous improvement of the masses and their conditions, That may include the expansion of primary education, facilities for technical upgradation of skill, sanitation and reduction of indebtedness of Indian peasants.

References

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