

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Political Ideas of Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Shrutilekha Barman

Assistant Professor, Barpeta Girls' College, Barpeta, Assam, India

Abstract:

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was one of the founding social and political leaders during the Indian Independence Movement against the British Empire. Gokhale's political thought revolves more around the socio-political issues of his time. Like most of the liberal Indian thinkers of his time Gokhale appreciated and welcomed the British rule in India.: Gokhale was essentially a liberal thinker. Gokhale preferred constitutional methods for attaining the goal of self government. Gokhale strongly favoured 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 interested in building a state based on western ideas. He thus laid emphasis on the principles of individual liberty and social equality. Gokhale supported the Swadeshi movement. Like Gandhi, Gokhale also believed in the primacy of means: In present days, we see the relevance of Gokhale's political ideas. In this paper an attempt will be made to explain the political ideas of Gokhale.

1. Introduction

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was one of the founding social and political leaders during the Indian Independence Movement against the British Empire. Gokhale, whom Mahatma Gandhi regarded his political Guru was born on 9 May 1866 in a Brahmin family of Maharashtra and died in Poona on 19th February, 1915. Being one of the first generations of Indians to receive a university education, Gokhale graduated from Elphinstone College in 1884. 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 Indian Society at Poona in 1905. The main aim of it was to provide political education and training to the youth of the country. This society taught the young men to dedicate themselves to the service of the country. Thousands of girl and boy became a member of this society.

2. Objectives

This paper tries to focus-

- Political ideas of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.
- Relevance of Gokhale's political ideas in present days.

3. Political Thought of Gokhale:

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

3.1. Responses to British Rule in India

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.

3.2. *Faith in Liberalism*

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.

3.3. *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.

3.4. *Support of 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 Hobhouse 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.

3.5. *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 bind 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 co-operation of these two communities.

3.6. *Faith in 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 laborers 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.

3.7. *Faith in the Western Principles and Institutions*

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 Swadeshism.

3.8. *The primacy of Means over Ends*

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

In present 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 an imminent political thinker. He has contributed a lot to Indian politics. He also stood for the introduction of moral values in politics. He also advocated moderation, reason and compromise as political technique.

6. References

1. Goyal . O.P, " Political thought of Gokhale", Kitab Mahal , Allahabad ,1965
2. Verma . V.P, Modern Indian Political Thought, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal , Agra,1996
3. Talwalkar Govind " Gopal Krishna Gokhale :His Life and Times",Rrupa Publications,New Delhi, 2006
4. Sharma Narain Jai, "Encyclopaedia of Eminent Thinkers: The Political Thought of Gopal Krishna Gokhale (Volume-27)",Concept Ppublishing Company Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2010