

University Grants Commission
Minor Research Project

Exploring the Relevance of Gopal Krishna Gokhale in the Context of Political Liberalism

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Executive Summary

Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) was not only a great patriot, social reformer and statesman but also a political thinker par excellence. He is venerated because of the ideas of political liberalism which he propounded during the turbulent colonial times. The Indian National Congress, since its establishment in 1885, was demanding a series of constitutional reforms from the British but its persuasions were not heeded to. On the other hand, the British Raj was imposing draconian laws one after another. The leaders of Congress were losing faith in British rule and this was giving rise to political extremism in the country. Gokhale had a dual and difficult task before him. On the one hand he had to convince the British administration about the just demands of the Indian people and on the other, he had to convince the people about the fair and lawful approach of the British.

Gokhale tried to accomplish this task in a variety of ways. In the first place, he correctly understood that if Indians had to engage with the mighty British Raj, then they had to get themselves educated. Therefore, he not only advocated school and college education but also participated in founding indigenous educational institutions like the Deccan Education Society. Most importantly, he viewed such institutions as public service institutions and founded the 'Servants of India Society' in 1905.

Gokhale was not just an arm-chair political thinker but also an active politician. He was associated with the Congress from 1889 and became its president in 1894. He led the moderates in the Congress against the tirade of the extremists. He was also the Mayor of Pune Municipality and was elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1899. In 1902 he became a member of the Central Legislative Council and served there till his last breath in 1915. As a member of the

councils he not only championed the cause of the Indian people (who were suffering both the natural and imperial calamities) but also vigorously participated into policy formulation. Though he admired the British rule for its fairness, he did not hesitate to criticise the unjust policies. His speeches on the budgets and economics were exemplary. His greatest contribution was to amend the Morley-Minto Reforms in 1909 which was a classic example of his statesmanship and intellectual brilliance.

The present research has brought out the contribution of Gokhale through the lens of political liberalism. It is concluded that the foundation of liberalism which Gokhale laid in the previous century has actually served as the basis for Indian polity in the later years. Liberalism is just not the theoretical perspective but also an active driver of political processes. In today's context this liberalism is extremely important because people's faith in democratic and constitutional politics has to be retained and at the same time their political and developmental aspirations have to be accommodated. How to achieve this is something we can learn from Gokhale's life and thought, and that is the contribution of the present project.
