Chapter – III

Gokhale in the Imperial Council - Political and Administrative Issues

Gokhale’s election to the Imperial Council

The elective seat allotted to the Bombay Presidency in the Imperial Council, had been occupied by Pherozeshah Mehta, since 1893. However, ill-health compelled him to resign in 1901. Gokhale, who had aspired to enter the Supreme Council, decided to win over Mehta’s support for his candidature. In a letter to Mehta (dated 15th January 1901), which was drafted with consummate skill, Gokhale laid bare his hopes and aspirations. He spoke of his impending retirement from the Fergusson College, to which he had dedicated the best years of his youth, and of his intention to devote the rest of his life to political work in India and in England. He also mentioned that his wife’s death had destroyed the principle tie that bound him to family life and settled home, and he could now devote himself fully into the field of politics. Appreciating Mehta’s qualities as a political leader, Gokhale asked for sympathy and encouragement. He attested that the experiences of the Apology Case had made him more judicious and so his young age would not be an impediment. He also assured Mehta that he did not seek the honour on grounds merely of personal ambition and that he had decided to devote his life to the furtherance of the Indian political cause in England. Therefore, for this work, a brief period of membership of the Viceroy’s Council would be very useful.¹

In this way, with due deference to Mehta, Gokhale made him aware of his intention to enter not only the Imperial Council but also the British Parliament in London, and staked his claims on a public rather than on a private plane. P. M. Mehta, on the other hand, had seen Gokhale’s capacities in the Sarvajanik Sabha, INC, Welby Commission and Bombay Council. He had also sought Gokhale’s assistance for his budget speeches and was thus aware of his talents.² Hence, he decided to support Gokhale. At one time Mr. Bomanji Petit, Mr. Ibrahim Rahimtulla and Chimanlal Setalvad wanted to contest for the seat but gave up the struggle since Gokhale had anticipated them by a long distance.
Though Mehta’s support was a great asset to Gokhale, he took no chances and canvassed the support of each of his fellow legislator in the Bombay Council including N. G. Chandavarkar. It was through Mr. N. Bennett of the Times of India that he got the support of Mr. Moses, one of the European members, practically ensuring his election as now he would get seven out of the total of twelve votes i.e. absolute majority.

On 20th December 1901, at the age of thirty-five, Gokhale took his seat as an additional member of the Imperial Council at Calcutta. Though Gokhale had originally intended to remain in the council only for a term and then shift his activities to London, he soon gave up this intension for he realized that any solid political work could be done in India only. In 1903, he therefore sought for re-election. This however brought him in clash with Ibrahim Rahimtulla, who had aspired for the seat earlier and had withdrawn because Mehta had told him that Gokhale would remain in the Council for one term only. He asked Gokhale for an explanation. Gokhale replied to him in the strongest of words – ‘I cannot understand how you should take it upon yourself to address such a letter to me. Our relations are not of a character to permit of your charging me in this reckless fashion with breach of faith or stealing a march over you or things of that kind. There never was any understanding between you and me, express or implied. You know quite well that you retired from the contest last time, because you had not the ghost of a chance against me, and I have in my possession a letter written by you to one honorable member, in which you distinctly state that you had to withdraw then, because the field was already occupied by me.’

Gokhale was backed by Venilal Chunilal, Vinchurkar, Khare, Parekh and Moses. His nomination form was signed by Mr. Mehta as proposer and seconded by Sir Bhalchandra and the other form signed by Mr. Moses and seconded by Mr. Dick (or Parekh). During the next term, however, Rahimtulla had recorded his vote in Gokhale’s favour, much in advance. He wrote – ‘I considered it my duty to do so, as I think your services on the Imperial Council eminently entitle you to the hearty support of every Indian. May you long continue to devote yourself to the cause of your country and earn
their lasting gratitude.\textsuperscript{7} He was able to get a seat in the Imperial Council only after its expansion in 1909.

Though Gokhale remained a member of the Council till his death in 1915, it is clear from his private correspondence that he wanted to retire on several occasion so that he could devote more time to politics outside the council. However, his own desire to serve the Indian cause in the Council and the insistence of both his Indian and British colleagues made him continue his membership. The Finance Members, Edward Law and Edward Baker urged him to remain in the Council.\textsuperscript{8} Similarly Malaviya considered that ‘Without him the work of the Council will fall to a very poor level. I am sorry to say it, but it is a fact that there is not one among those who are likely to be members of the re-elected Council, who will be able to do half the work and do it half so well as Gokhale did and it will be a thousand pities therefore if he will not be there.’\textsuperscript{9} It was Gokhale’s profound knowledge and his consummate skill as a debater that made his presence required both by his Indian and the official colleagues.

General Political Situation between 1901 – 1905 and Gokhale’s Political Philosophy

Among the three broad divisions of the Indian nationalists during the freedom struggle, viz. – the moderates, the extremists and the revolutionaries, Gokhale belonged to the first group. The moderates believed in the continuance of the British rule in India and had faith in British fairplay and justice. They believed in constitutional agitation, their aim was larger association of Indians in the administration of the country and their watchword was liberalism and moderation. Ranade, Gokhale’s political master, clearly defined these two words in his prospectus of the Deccan Sabha thus, - ‘The spirit of liberalism implies a freedom from race and creed prejudices and a steady devotion to all that seeks to do justice between man and man, giving to the rulers the loyalty that is due to the law they are bound to administer, but securing at the same time to the people the equality which is their right under the law. Moderation implies the conditions of never vainly aspiring after the impossible or after too remote ideals, but striving each day to take the next step in the order
of natural growth by doing the work that lies nearest to our hands in a spirit of compromise and fairness.'

Gokhale like Ranade, laid stress on the continuance of the British rule in India for he believed that whatever the shortcomings of the bureaucracy and however intolerable at times the insolence of individual Englishman, they alone stood at that time in the country for order and without continued order, no real progress was possible for the Indians. The historical background of continued disorder in India and the importance of order established by the English made him support the British rule. Therefore, for Gokhale, the British rule was a necessity and it was not to be merely tolerated but actively supported for the peaceful revolution of the Indian race. However, under that rule there was no restriction for development. At the 5th Anniversary Day inaugural address of the Servants of India Society, he said – ‘To strive for equality with the Englishman is not only our right but it is our duty also. Rightful agitation is responsibility, not occupation; those who fail to agitate fail to discharge their responsibilities. This equality can be obtained only by undertaking and discharging these responsibilities.’ However, he did not want to build up the nation in an aggressive spirit. His work was thus inoffensive, persuasive, enlightening and elevating.

Gokhale had imbibed the spirit of moderation from Ranade. Dadabhai Naoroji, R. C. Dutt and Pherozeshah Mehta also inspired him. However, he was much younger to them and so more flexible. He could sense the changing times and the new spirit around. There were significant signs of discontent throughout the country as the new century dawned. The famines, epidemics, agricultural and industrial backwardness, poverty, inflation, were some of the causes behind this discontent. The western education had made the new educated class politically conscious but they were not given effective representation in the administration. The socio-religious movements had roused nationalism and unity among the Indians. However, the discontent was an undercurrent. It was the repressive measures of Lord Curzon that aggravated the situation. The partition of Bengal into two provinces in 1905 which the British government professed had been done for administrative convenience was looked upon by the Indians as a deliberate policy of ‘divide and rule’ to disunite Bengal on religious grounds. On the international scene, Japan’s victory over
Russia in the same year highly inspired the Indians as it depicted Asian victory over the imperialist Europe. Thus, a strong political agitation was launched against the Bengal partition. It also gave rise to the Extremist wing in the Congress with a new political philosophy. They did not believe in the moderate policy of protesting, pleading and petitioning. Instead of the moderate method of association with the Government where possible and opposition to it where necessary, the Extremists believed in the method of opposition to the Government, pure and simple or in other words organizing obstruction to Government in every possible direction within the limits of the laws so as to bring the administration to a stand-still and compel the authorities to capitulate. Their leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, B. C. Pal and Arvind Ghosh were able to appeal to the sentiments of the masses and mobilize them. They also provided to the people a new field of direct action by advocating Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. It should be noted that it was in the same year (1905) that Gokhale coined the phase ‘spiritualization of public life.’ Japan’s victory had inspired him equally and it was immediately after he read the news of Japanese victory that he took the final decision to set up the Servants of India Society (S.I.S) for a well ordered progress of the country and to prepare the Indians for self-government. Instead of Swaraj Gokhale spoke of self-government within the British Empire and accepted it as his aim in 1905 in the preamble of the S.I.S, at a time when Congress still clung on to its aim of ‘Good Government’. It was only in 1908 that the Congress declared self-government as its aim. To Gokhale, self-government meant – ‘substituting Indian, for the English agency, expanding and reforming the Legislative Councils till they become in reality true controlling bodies, and letting the people generally manage their own affairs themselves.’

Gokhale strongly supported the Swadeshi movement during the post partition period. His support was based not only on the patriotic sentiment but also on the economic aspect that aimed at home production for economic self-reliance. However, closely connected with the Swadeshism was another movement and that was boycott of British goods. To Gokhale boycott was a political weapon used for a definite purpose but to be reserved only for extreme occasions. He believed that there were obvious risks involved in its failure and that it could not be used with sufficient effectiveness, unless there was an
extraordinary upheaval of popular feeling behind it. Thus, in Bengal where the occasion was extreme and where all the classes and all the leaders had united on a common platform, he supported boycott as perfectly legitimate. But he opposed the extension of boycott beyond Bengal. For the extremists, boycott was a power of self-denial and self-abstinence in such a way as not to assist the foreign Government to rule over the Indians. Gokhale disliked the very term ‘boycott’ for it conveyed a vindictive desire to injure others and he entertained no such desire as far as England was concerned. Gokhale however could not find an alternative to that term but M.K. Gandhi, who regarded Gokhale his master, used the term ‘Satyagraha’ or passive resistance in 1907. Gokhale strongly supported Gandhi’s passive resistance movement in South Africa. The movement was defensive in nature and it fought with moral and spiritual weapons. A passive resister deliberately and openly violated the requirements of an unjust law or order for he could not conscientiously submit to that law or order. He also did not seek to evade the consequences of that but invited them and gloried in them. It was a spiritual struggle essentially in keeping with the highest traditions of Indian spirituality. Boycott, on the other hand was offensive in nature and required non-assistance towards the Government in every branch of administration including civil, military, judiciary, revenue and also non-payment of taxes. Thus, boycott and passive resistance were more or less similar in nature but different in spirit and principle.

It can be said from the above-mentioned views that though Gokhale sympathized with the rising new spirit and with the extremist political agenda, he strongly opposed their methods. At the same time, he was ready to discard some of the old moderate concepts and co-operate with the extremists on certain issues. His own political philosophy can be traced in the constitution of the Servants of India Society that he established in June 1905. His aim was that of a united and renovated India which was to be achieved by training men, (prepared to devote their lives to the cause of the country in a religious spirit) for the work of political education and agitation, and to promote by all constitutional means the national interests of the Indians. His motto was ‘spiritualization of public life’ which pointed to a fervent patriotism, sacrifice for the motherland, pursuance of one’s objects dauntlessly and a deep faith in the purpose of Providence. In other words, it aimed at creating political
monks who would achieve a secular objective in a religious and missionary spirit. In the
growing atmosphere of unrest and violence, Gokhale wanted to divert the youthful energies
of the country into a constructive sphere. He thus raised politics to a higher plane of
morality, purity and idealism and all his actions and decisions can be justified on the
singular motto of 'spiritualization of public life'.

The establishment of S.I.S also proves that Gokhale did not believe in the traditional
view of venting the Indian grievances only once during the Congress session. He believed
in solid work throughout the year to be undertaken by specially trained men. The hard core
within the Congress led by P. M. Mehta was opposed to any change. Gokhale regretted
Pherozeshah's opposition to drafting a constitution to the Congress. While Gokhale tried
to mediate in order to avoid the split in Congress in 1907, Mehta felt that men with
different views should not work together. Again, in 1914, inspite of Mehta's opposition,
Gokhale tried a compromise with Tilak to reunite the Congress, though the attempt failed.
Although Gokhale and Tilak belonged to rival political groups, then continued to have high
regard for each other and during the post-partition period, they shared the feeling of mutual
cooperation for the country's welfare. Similarly, Gokhale and Lajpat Rai shared strong
bonds of friendship. Gokhale called him a 'selfless public worker' and felt that if better tact
had been displayed in meeting the wishes of men like him, Lalaji would have been more
actively on the moderate side. Lajpat Rai, on the other hand referred to Gokhale as 'highly
patriotic' and inspired by Gokhale's S.I.S established the Servants of People society in
1929 at Lahore. In the Council, Gokhale challenged and questioned the authorities over
Lajpat Rai's deportation without trial and pressurized the Government for his early release.
He also refused to denounce the extremists and objected to the labeling of the members of
the secret societies as members of criminal tribes (discussed later in the chapter). Therefore,
just as there were several differences of opinions between Gokhale, Tilak and Lajpat Rai,
there were also several matters over which Gokhale and Mehta differed.

Gokhale also differed from the other moderate leaders in certain respects. While
most of the moderate leaders had their own flourishing professions and attended to
Congress work only as a part-time job, Gokhale after his retirement from D.E.S took to
politics as a full time job. In the legislature, he was the elected non-official member i.e. the representative of the people in the Council. He refused the honour of K.C.I.E in 1913 -- an honour appreciated by many of the contemporary moderate leaders. In the Council, though his language was mild, his demands were not so. He put forth a comprehensive scheme of civil and military retrenchment, diverting the budget surpluses for material benefits of the masses, agricultural and industrial development, expansion of local self-government, Indianization of services and universal extension of primary education.

Therefore, it can be argued that Gokhale worked halfway between the traditional Congress teachings and the ideas of the new radicals. He followed a middle path between the Moderate and the Extremist creed. He also attempted to cooperate with the British to seek the welfare of the masses. He also tried to win over the Muslim support by supporting separate representation. His object was to work with all - the moderates, the extremists, the Muslims and also the British officials. In his Congress presidential speech he said – ‘Not by methods of exclusion but by those of comprehension, not by insisting on every one working in the same part of the field, but by leaving each one free to select his own corner, by attracting to the cause all who are likely to help and not alienating any who are already with us.’ This affirms that Gokhale wanted to work unitedly with all. He believed in rising by agitation and not by revolution. He had faith in work and sacrifice. His aim was to move from bureaucracy to democracy. His vision was peace, harmony, construction and development of the nation.

Gokhale has expressed his political views from three platforms -- 1) through his speeches in the Council, 2) through his speeches outside the Council in India that is, his Congress speeches and other public speeches and 3) through speeches in England before the English public opinion. This chapter deals only with his speeches in the Council where he effectively put forth the Indian opinion regarding the various governmental measures.
On 14th February 1902, the report of the Select Committee on the Cantonments (House Accommodation) Bill was taken into consideration. The object of the bill introduced by Major-General Sir Edmond Elles was to make better provision for securing house accommodation for officers in cantonments. Gokhale was a member of the Select Committee.

In cases of private houses in the cantonment area, when neither the house-owner nor the Government could show or clear title, the Government asserted its ownership of the land. Thus, certain clauses in the bill called for enquiry into such titles and impose upon those persons certain conditions and presumptions. Objection was taken to these clauses as practically an act of confiscation. Mr. Pugh therefore moved several amendments to the bill and the Government accepted all the amendments. Among others who supported the amendments were Mr. Hardy, Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami, P. Anand Charlu, Sri Ram Bahadur, Sir Andrew Wingate and Gokhale.

In his speech, Gokhale made a few observations on the general character of the measure. Though the stringency of original provisions had been greatly softened by the amendments, he believed that a legislation of so exceptional a character, interfering with the normal freedom of contract between the house-owners and the tenants, could be justified only on grounds of the strongest necessity and that in case of large number of cantonments such a necessity did not exist at all. Citing the example of his hometown Poona, he pointed out that there were many similar cantonments, where the bungalows were in excess of the military demand and thus remained vacant. He therefore suggested that where the military requirements were fixed, the Government could select certain fixed number of bungalows at a fixed rent for the officers. He feared that the operation of the enactment by the executive would prove prejudicial to the interests of the house-owners. He also doubted the effectiveness of the Committees of Arbitration. So as a further addition to the safeguards he urged the Government to publish a statement every year showing the number of cases in which the coercive clauses of the bill were enforced during the year.
This was Gokhale's maiden speech in the Imperial Council. Though short in content, it contained all the features that typified all his speeches – that is non-offensive criticism of the proposed legislation and constructive suggestions for its improvement.

In 1903, Sir Edmond Elles introduced the Indian Works of Defense Bill to provide for imposing restrictions upon land in the vicinity of works of defense in order that such land may be kept free from buildings and other obstructions. In signing the Report of the Select Committee, Gokhale appended a few observations of dissent in regard to the provision introduced by the Committee for cases of emergency. He raised the issue again in the Council on 20th March. He suggested that as in the general cases even in cases of emergency, some previous notice be given to the occupier before he is turned out of his house in the exercise of the powers conferred by the Act.

In both these instances, Gokhale’s concern for the public and his effort to uphold the cause of those whom he represented in the Council is evident.

Demand for citizen – Soldiership

As a protest against the military policy of the Government, Gokhale not only urged for reduction in the military expenditure (Chapter 4) but also enumerated the several defects in the defense policy of the country. The Indian Army was for all practical purposes a standing army, maintained on war footing even in times of peace. It was altogether an inexpensive force, without any strong reserve forces to support it. The Indians were debarred from the privileges of citizen soldiership and from all voluntary participation in the responsibilities of national defense. The native army was only theoretically a Long Service Army. All this was both politically and financially defective and Gokhale regarded the entire defense system as based on a ‘policy of distrust’. Indians were almost excluded from army, the recruitment being confined to frontier or transfrontier men i.e. men of non-Indian or extra Indian areas. The common people were mostly disarmed, the licenses to hold arms being issued most sparingly under the Arms Act. In 1906, the number of British
officers attached to the Native Army was increased thus completely ousting the Native officers from the position that they had held earlier.

Under the circumstances, the Indians demanded the commissioned ranks in the army to be thrown open to qualified Indians, scions of aristocratic families and so on. In 1905, 4 members of Cadet Corps were granted Commissions but they were not given positions equal to the British officers. In 1906, therefore, Gokhale put forward certain measures to place India's defense on national basis. These were – (1) Short Service for the Indian Army (2) Creation of Indian Reserves (3) a gradual extension – first to select classes of the community, and then, as confidence grew to all – of the privileges of citizen - soldiership. He did not mind if the Government moved slowly and cautiously but it was in this direction that he wanted the Government to move to base the military on national basis.

Gokhale opposes the bureaucratic set-up

While the Indian leaders demanded rapid Indianization of the Civil Service, they also strongly criticized the monopolization of the services by the Europeans. Gokhale referred to the Civil Service as a caste ‘with all the exclusiveness and love of monopoly that characterize castes.’ At another place he called the Civil Service in the country the standing Conservative party in Indian administration, more firmly rooted in absolute power than the Conservative party in England. The British officials spoke of responsibility to England not to India. This official conservatism and bureaucratic reluctance to part with power put impediments in path of all sorts of reform and thus limited the efficiency of the administration. Under such a system, there was nobody in the Government who was permanently identified with the interests of the people. Secondly, it led to the exclusion of the Indian educated classes from power and lastly the interests of the services were allowed to take precedence of the interests of the people.

The result of this was that the policy of equality between the two races had become merely a legal fiction. The Government was dependent largely on confidential police
reports, on surveillance of people suspected of entertaining advanced ideas and was hostile towards the educated classes. \(^\text{25}\) Large amounts were spent on Civil and Military departments and on the salaries of the British officers but not much was spent on primary and industrial education.

The remedy to this state of things was self-government, which alone could ensure higher efficiency and popular control in the Government. The political evolution to which Gokhale looked forward to was a representative Government on democratic basis. Hence he always demanded the reconstruction of the bureaucratic form of administration in India on more liberal lines so as to associate the people of the country with the administration. In the Council too, he demanded the Indianization of services and based his demand on the higher grounds of national prestige and self-respect.

**The Press Legislations**

Gokhale was a stout defender of the freedom of press. As the editor of the quarterly journal of the Sarvajanik Sabha and as the co-editor of ‘Sudharak’, he had also had practical experience in journalism. The press that originated in India due to the efforts of some European individuals was gagged by the earlier Governors through several rules of conduct till 1835 when Sir Charles Metcalfe made it free. However, during the revolt of 1857, Lord Canning passed a Press Act for regulating printing presses and some printed books and papers. This annoyed the Anglo Indians. Therefore, in 1867, the earlier act was reimplemented in the form of the Press and Registration of Books Act and till 1878, the press was left unmolested. Meanwhile the Indians also entered the field and thus a Nationalist Press both in English and vernacular languages sprang up. As a bitter critic of the Government policies, it engaged in rousing political consciousness among the Indians. It was detached from the Anglo-Indian press that mostly supported the Government and opposed both the moderate and the extremist nationalists. In 1878, in order to establish more control over the Nationalist press, Lord Lytton passed the Vernacular Press Act but in 1882, Lord Ripon repealed it. However, the bureaucracy could not tolerate criticism and so
in 1898, certain amendments were made in the Indian Penal Code to punish journalists who transgressed the bounds of legitimate criticism.

In 1903, the Government under Lord Curzon sought to amend the Indian Official Secrets Act of 1889 and a bill to this effect was introduced by Mr. Arundel on 28th August. The amendment called for civil matters to be placed on the same level as military and naval matters and that offenders be ineligible for bail. It was an attempt to give the Government undefined and complete authority to prosecute.

Both the Indian and the Anglo-Indian press denounced the bill, the Gujrati calling it a departure to the elementary principles of criminal jurisprudence and the ‘Englishman’ describing it as calculated to Russianize the Indian administration. It was generally believed in the Indian circles that the bill was introduced to prevent the publication of confidential circulars as had been done some time back by some Indian papers.

On 4th December, in the Council, Gokhale made an outspoken and weighty speech denouncing the bill both in its principle and in its details. He based his criticism mainly on two planks. While opposing the inclusion of civil matters under the bill, he went on to advocate the freedom of press which alone was according to him an outward check operating continuously upon the conduct of the bureaucracy possessing absolute and uncontrolled power. And this was all the more important in India as the governmental responsibility to the people here was merely moral and not legal as was in the west. Secondly, he pointed out that the bill in practice would affect only the Indian press while the Anglo Indian press, owing to official support, would conveniently escape from its abuses.

Gokhale also objected to the other two amendments the first making a man’s mere entry into any government office without lawful authority or permission an offense and the second making all such offences cognizable and non-bailable. He believed that such proposals were abhorrent to ordinary notions of fairness and would confer undue powers in the hands of lower police. He also courageously referred to the controversy over the
railway circulars that had supposedly led to the above legislation and suggested that instead of gagging the press the real remedy was to discourage the issue of confidential circulars, which violated the promises given again and again by the government both in India and in England.  

Gokhale’s scathing attack on the bill put the Government on the defensive and Arundel stated that he was not well prepared to answer the above objections. On 18th December, Lord Curzon climbed down over the bill. He contended that the bill had really been drafted six years ago and that its resuscitation was due to some recent illicit photographing of defenses. He did not explain why civil matters were included in the bill but said that the Government would alter the language if convinced of its unsuitability and modify it. Meanwhile the British Committee of INC led by Wedderburn, Naoroji and others submitted a memorial to the Secretary of State Mr. Brodrick and the proceedings of the Select Committee were suspended until the memorial together with Brodrick’s observations on it reached the Government of India. This secured a short breathing space for the bill. At the monthly meeting of the Metropolitan Radical Federation on 16th January, Mr. W. C. Wade moved a resolution condemning the bill seconded by Mr. Richards. While public opinion was thus being mobilized in England, back at home, Pandit Vishen Narayan Dhur of Oudh moved a resolution condemning the bill at the annual Congress session at Madras.

Curzon’s assurances brought about a lull in the storm of public indignation, but unfortunately, they were not fulfilled. Mr. Arundel, while presenting the report of the Select Committee on 5th February 1904 stated that the editors of newspapers could not escape the natural and indeed inevitable responsibilities of their profession. However, many of Gokhale’s objections were met with in the Select Committee. Firstly, the term ‘civil affairs’ was defined limiting it to matters of major importance such as the Government’s relations with foreign States or Native States of India. Secondly, mere entry without permission in a Government office was not to be an offense unless it was for the purpose of wrongfully obtaining information. Thirdly, all offences regarding civil affairs were made non-cognizable and bailable.
Gokhale found even the amended bill as open to serious objection and urged the Government even during the final discussion to abandon it altogether. He, Nawab Saiyid Muhammad and B.K. Bose signed the report of the Select Committee subject to dissent on two points — (1) certain words in the definition of ‘civil-affairs’ would confer too wide a power on the Government (2) and that the publishing of information regarding Native States ought not be an offence unless the information was wrongfully obtained. It was regarding these two points that Gokhale moved certain amendments when the bill came up for final discussion on 4th March 1904. His major amendment, which sought to define ‘civil affairs’ with some degree of definiteness, was rejected by 7 to 16 votes. His other amendments and also those of Dr. Ashutosh Mukhopadhyaya and Sri Ram Bahadur and T. Morison met with the same fate and in spite of the Indian opposition, Mr. Arundel’s amendment which vaguely tried to further guarantee the definite scope of the bill, was passed.

The Government maintained that — (1) in amending the Act of 1889, they were merely putting back into it what was always intended to be there (2) that the protection of civil secrets was among the primary rights of a civilized state and (3) that in India there was greater need for the exercise of this right than in many other countries.

The bill was passed after five hours of discussion and despite strong Indian opposition. While voting against the motion, Gokhale forcefully exposed the anomalies in the policies of the government in England and India. In its report, ‘India’ remarked indignantly — ‘But the Government which refuses free expression of public opinion may fancy that it has made for itself an earthly paradise, but it is not a paradise of wise. The silence that it obtains is the silence of a padded room... But for impartial observers, who wish well to the government, there is only one word which describes the performance. It is suicide’. Ironically enough, the H. H. Agha Khan extended his support to the bill and the Anglo-Indian member T. Morison opposed it.

While the bill was passed, its more rigorous features were softened owing to Gokhale’s spirited opposition to them in the Council and in the Select Committee. He not
only supported the Press as the custodian of public interests in India but also emphasized the utter neglect of public opinion by the Government. He was also able to point out the differential treatment accorded to the Indian and the Anglo-Indian press.

It was on more than one occasion that Gokhale attacked the Anglo-Indian press for their pro-government and anti-Indian propaganda and for enjoying the official support. In 1907, he condemned the State prosecution of the ‘Punjabee’ on a charge of exciting racial ill-will when the Civil and Military Gazette had been let off with only a gentle remonstrance. He believed that the writings in the Anglo-Indian press had a large share in turning the Indians against the British rule. He condemned the racial arrogance and contempt that marked these papers. His opposition to the Anglo-Indian press was so firm that when Lovat Fraser, the editor of Times of India, and one who had often criticized Gokhale in his paper, wanted to meet him to make peace before he left India, Gokhale refused to meet him as he was an English editor and it would be against his dignity to do so.

On the other hand, he considered the Indian Press a potent instrument of progress. It had quickened national consciousness, it had spread the ideas of justice and equality, it had stimulated public spirit and had set higher standards of public duty. The attitude of the Indian press was determined by the relations between the English and the Indian and by the questions that agitated the public mind. Hence, the remedy to this was a sustained effort on both sides to improve the relations between the British and the Indians.

Lord Minto as the Viceroy succeeded Lord Curzon in 1906. The Indians expected the new Liberal Government to reverse the partition but it was declared as a ‘settled fact’. The Indian disappointment found expression in increased discontent and violence. In Bengal and Punjab, the discontent was immense. Fiery words were printed in the newspapers to rouse the masses, which inspired violent outbursts against the British officials. This made the Government nervous. The result was prosecution of several newspapers. Since the situation did not improve, the Government passed the Press Resolution of June 1907 that warned all newspapers against publishing seditious matters.
This warning too did not yield the desired result and so between 1907-08, prosecutions were launched against several Indian newspapers like 'Bande Mataram', 'Yugantar', 'Vihari', 'Punjabee' etc. However, the seditious tone of the newspapers did not subside and this time the Government responded by passing a more stringent law – The Indian Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act in 1908. The Act was passed on 8th June 1908. Gokhale was at that time on his fourth visit to England and so did not attend the Council meeting. Intended to prevent the printing of incitements to murder and to an act of violence, this Act empowered the local authorities to take judicial action against the editor of any newspaper that published matter that in their view was an incitement to murder and rebellion. It was under this Act that Tilak (Kesari) Arvind Ghose (Bande Mataram), Bhupendra Nath Dutt (Yugantar) and several others were convicted and sent to jail. It should be noted that some of the Anglo-Indian papers were also ‘equally mischievous and disgracefully low in tone’ but they were left unmolested.

The Morley-Minto reforms were adopted in 1909 and the enlarged and reformed Imperial Council met for the first time on 25th January 1910, Sir. S.P.Sinha the Law Member being appointed as the first Indian member of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Just before the meeting of the Council, a police officer was shot dead outside the Calcutta High Court. Earlier in November 1909, an attempt was made on the Viceroy's life. Infact, several terrorist outrages took place in 1909 the most sensational among them being the murder of Sir. William Curzon Wyllie, the political A.D.C. to the Secretary of State for India on 1st July in London and that of Mr. Jackson, the Collector of Nasik on 21st December. Seditious literature was being smuggled from abroad and the native press continued its crusade against the unjust British rule. The European community in India pressed the Government for stern measures. The Government reacted by extending the Seditious Meetings Act of 1907 to the whole of India and by introducing the Press Bill on 4th February 1910. The object of the bill - introduced by Sir Herbert Risley - was to provide for a better control of the Indian Press or in other words to confine the Press both Indian and European within the limits of legitimate discussion.
The principle addition, which the Bill made to the powers already possessed by the Government for dealing with sedition, was that it made the taking of security from printing presses and newspapers a purely executive act. This security deposit could be between Rs. 500 and Rs. 5000. The bill also empowered the Executive to order the forfeiture of such security and even the confiscation of printing presses on the grounds that an offence had been committed, though here an appeal was allowed to a Special Tribunal of High Court Judges. Similarly, strict checking of printed material was to be carried on by customs, postal services and police to subdue secret prints.

The official stand was to proceed by way of prevention rather than by way of punishment in order to ensure the continuance of British rule in India and the protection of its officers and the student class. Thus, for them the bill was a necessity. With unusual haste, the bill was rushed through the Council, without giving the country practically any opportunity to express its opinion on it. Gokhale and Mudholkar attached a minute of dissent to the report of the Select Committee that presented its report within four days.

Meanwhile, much had gone on behind the scenes to compel Gokhale to withhold his voting against the Bill. Lord Sinha, the Law Member, threatened to resign as the original draft bill was too drastic. However, Minto felt that the resignation of the first Indian admitted into the Governor General’s executive Council in less than a year after the appointment and that too on a political issue would produce a disastrous effect on public opinion in England. Lord Morley’s opinion was that if Sinha did not withdraw his resignation, it would take fifty years more for any Secretary of State to think of appointing another Indian. Therefore, Minto urged Gokhale and Sir Lawrence Jenkins (the Chief Justice) to advice Sinha to withdraw his resignation. Both Sinha and Gokhale demanded certain amendments in the original draft of the bill; the most important one was the provision for an appeal to the High Court and to exclude the already existing presses from the demands of security. The Viceroy accepted these amendments inspite of strong opposition of the other members of his Council. However, still finding the bill stringent, Sinha again threatened to throw up office unless Gokhale joined him in supporting the bill in the Council. Gokhale found the condition unreasonable. However, Sinha remained
adamant and in order to avert what he regarded as the ‘gross impropriety of Mr. Sinha resigning at that stage’, Gokhale agreed to refrain from opposing or voting against the bill, but retaining perfect liberty to move amendments in the Select Committee and the Council.\(^{44}\)

The public was unaware of this inside story at that time and hence Gokhale had to face severe criticism. Even Pherozeshah Mehta, who knew the story, objected to ‘the representative of the Bombay Presidency going out of his way and standing shoulder to shoulder with Sinha, taking a large part of the odium on himself.’ \(^{45}\) However, Gokhale looked at the question not from the point of Bombay Presidency but from that of whole India. Moreover, he wanted the reforms, in the shaping of which he had played an important role, to be successfully employed.

On 8\(^{\text{th}}\) February 1910, when the bill came up for debate, in a short but shrewdly worded speech, Gokhale stated that he would not be justified in opposing the principle of the bill. \(^{46}\) He never acknowledged his support to the bill but gave assent to its principle only. He contended that the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code would have been sufficient to deal with the situation. Though he accepted the existence of violence and sedition, he blamed the partition of Bengal and the writings in the Anglo-Indian Press for it. He urged the Government to use the powers conferred by the bill with utmost care and caution and suggested a policy of mutual co-operation and wise conciliation on the part of the Government. \(^{47}\) He moved six amendments to the bill that intended to soften the provisions regarding the securities in order to protect the small concerns, and harmless organs like those of backward communities that had no connection with sedition. The last of his amendments that aimed at limiting the operation of the bill to a period of three years was supported by many of his colleagues and even Sir. H. Risley went up to the Viceroy and asked him if he was to accept it but Minto said ‘No’. \(^{48}\) The amendment being put to vote was lost by 16 votes to 42. The bill as amended was passed but Gokhale neither voted for nor against the bill. \(^{49}\) Among the other members, Bhupendranath Basu and Madan Mohan Malaviya were most strong in their criticism. While Basu felt the bill would ‘choke
up the springs of knowledge’, Malaviya asked for postponement of its further consideration. The rest of the members supported the bill.

Neither Gokhale nor any of the other non-official members were enthusiastic about the Act. However, coming as it did at a psychological moment, the murder of the police officer in Calcutta and the anxiety of employing the reforms successfully swung the vote. Though Gokhale had urged the Government to administer the Act with utmost care, tact and restraint and had also been similarly assured by the Government in private and public conversations, yet as soon as the bill was passed, it was applied most foolishly, harshly and indiscriminately. Securities were demanded from old concerns even for a mere formal change in their registration and without specifying what their offence was. Worst cases appeared in Bombay and Gokhale found his position intolerable. He met the Governor Sir George Clarke who then issued orders to set matters right. On 6th August 1910 and again on 20th March 1911, Gokhale charged the government with betrayal of non-official sentiments behind supporting the bill. He strongly condemned the harsh and unjust application of the Act. He considered the proscription of Mr. Mackarness’s harmless pamphlet on police reform as an action of deep humiliation and pain. He blamed the Magistrates for enforcing the letter and not the spirit of the law.

Gokhale’s protests were however in vain and it was only in 1922, when as a result of the recommendations of the Sapru Committee that both the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act of 1908 and the Press Act of 1910 were repealed.

During the budget session of 1911, Gokhale supported Babu Bhupendranath Basu in opposing the grant of subsidy for an Indian language newspaper. The Government had decided to subsidize by an amount of Rs. 65,000 a vernacular paper in Bengal, to be edited by Rai Narendra Nath Sen Bahadur, in order to combat the anti-Government propaganda of the vernacular press. The paper was to support the Government’s acts and policies. Gokhale observed that the opinions of such a subsidized paper would neither acquire the weight attached to a pronouncement from the Government nor would the Government always accept the responsibility for the views expressed in it. Thus, both the Government and the
newspaper would be thoroughly discredited. There was also the dangerous possibility of other provincial governments following suit with editors who had neither the prestige nor the qualifications of Sen. He therefore suggested a State paper or a private organ especially started by influential men. A better remedy was to bring about general improvement in the relations between British and the Indians. Thus, once again Gokhale supported the freedom of press in India.

General Political Situation between 1906-10 and Gokhale’s stand

The liberal government with Campbell Bannerman as the Prime Minister came to power in England in 1905 and Lord John Morley was appointed as the Secretary of State for India. Lord Minto took office in 1906 as the Indian Viceroy. The Indians had expected that the new government would reverse the policy of Lord Curzon with respect to the partition of Bengal, but this did not happen. Disappointed with the Government’s decision Indian nationalists took the attitude of uncompromising hostility.

The whole of East was at this time throbbing with a new impulse and a new passion (following the Japanese victory) and India was also affected by these changes. A profound and far reaching change was taking place in the public opinion of the country. A new generation with new notions and character was rising up which was losing hope in the British fairplay and justice. The Government had not dealt satisfactorily with the two important questions, that is the improvement in the condition of the masses and conciliation of the educated classes. The repressive measures of Lord Curzon had aggravated the situation. Hence, it was necessary for the new Government to give a turn to this new feeling and make it a source of strength and not of weakness to the Empire. Perhaps anticipating repressive measures from the Government, Gokhale in his first budget speech before Minto in 1906 stated that what the country needed at that moment above everything else was a Government national in spirit, even though foreign in personnel - a Government that would enable the Indians to feel that their interests were the first consideration with it, and that their wishes and opinions were to it a matter of some account. It was an appeal and a warning to the Government to conciliate and not to repress the new generation. However,
even the new government was quite deaf to such appeals. In the face of the partition agitation, the Government adopted several repressive measures in Bengal. Meetings were banned, students were expelled and criminal proceedings directed against many of them, street processions and the singing of the national song ‘Bande Mataram’ were prohibited. S.N. Banerjee, the veteran Bengali leader was arrested and fined at Barisal during the proceedings of the Provincial Conference held there. In Punjab too, there was a large discontent owing to the Colonization Bill and heavy increase in canal rates. It led to agrarian riots in that province. Anxious to establish order, the government arrested the two Punjab leaders Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh and deported them to Burma without trial.

The repressive measures of the Government instead of silencing its critics made the agitation even more vehement. Revolutionary groups established themselves into secret societies making the British the targets of their violent attacks. Several assassinations, conspiracies and political dacoities were committed – the important ones being the Muzaffarpur Bomb Case, the Maniktola Conspiracy Case (1908), the attack on Lord and Lady Minto, and the murder of Curzon Wyllie and Magistrate A.M.T. Jackson (1909). The Government once again reacted by passing several repressive acts like the Explosive Substances Act, the Newspapers Act, the Seditious Meetings Act and the Press Act, which severely harmed individual liberty and caused hardship even to the innocents.

Meanwhile the nationalist movement was greatly weakened owing to the split between the Moderate and the Extremist factions at the Surat session of the Congress in 1907. The Government with its repressive laws soon arrested and deported most of the extremist leaders. With Tilak in jail at Mandalay, Lajpat Rai settled in U.S.A and Arvind Ghose retired as a mendicant in Pondicherry, the extremist movement was sufficiently subdued. The moderates lacked the vigour and strength to inspire the masses. The Muslims, on the other hand, formed the Muslim League for ventilating their grievances, thus clearly establishing their separate entity from the non-Muslims.

The public mind was thus in a state of great tension and Gokhale believed that unless concessions were promptly announced and steps taken to associate the Indians with
the administration, the difficulties would increase. The Government had itself decided to
move forward in that direction and was contemplating a reform scheme. In 1906, Gokhale
met Lord Morley six times in London and put forth the Indian view through a list of reform
proposals. He was anxious about immediate enforcement of the reforms. The Government
however delayed them. In the budget speech of 1908, he warned the government of the dire
consequences of any further delay in this matter. He felt that disorder could be curbed not
by the policeman’s baton or the soldier’s bayonet but by the statesman’s insight, wisdom
and courage. The reforms were finally announced in 1909. It is believed that Gokhale
influenced the liberalization of some of the clauses of the Indian Councils Bill. However,
the reforms satisfied none except the Muslims for they were given excessive representation
in the Councils and special franchise rights. Gokhale has noted the general political
condition of India at this time accurately in his letter to Wedderburn dated 24th September
1909 - ‘The political situation in the country continues to be anxious not so much for the
Government now as for the Constitutional Party. I fear one of our numerous disintegration
has overtaken us again – this time it is the national movement that appears to be going to
pieces, throwing us back on Provincialism – and one grieves to find that there is no
influence available anywhere in the country, capable of staying the process. The
organization evolved by the genius of Mr. Hume out of the material prepared by a
succession of workers in different parts of the country is crumbling to pieces and the effort
of the nation’s heart and mind that brought us together in that organization seems to have
almost exhausted itself. The split at Surat followed by the vigour with which the
Government came down on the Extremists everywhere, has turned the whole Extremist
party into active enemies of the national constitutional movement. And the ‘moderates’
placed between the officials and the Extremists, have not the necessary public spirit and
energy of character to hold together effectively for long, though they are numerically strong
in the country. In addition to the incessant attacks of the Extremists, the conduct of the
Bengal ‘Moderates’ is hastening the disintegration of the national movement. Bengal really
has no leader on our side. Surendranath is an orator, but he has no great courage or
backbone, and he cannot keep in hand the unruly pack whom he professes to lead.
Moreover there is no doubt that the position of the constitutional party in Bengal has been
rendered practically impossible by the Government’s refusal to reconsider Partition and by
the continued incarceration of the deportees. The feeling is general throughout the county that most of these deportees, if not all, are innocent men, that they have been deported simply because the Government wanted to make an exhibition of force and strike somewhere and it selected these men, because they were able and active. No one believes the explanations that are from time to time given by the authorities in the House of Commons and a sense of a great unredressed wrong is poisoning the public mind. In these circumstances the whole movement of feeling in Bengal is towards extremism and Surendranath cannot help going with the current. The ‘Moderates’ in other Provinces, however, see clearly the danger of drifting into the arms of extremism and they are determined to stand firm, and this, I fear, means their separation before long from the Bengal ‘Moderates’. When this separation comes, it will mean in practice the end of the Congress as at present constituted. The movement will still find a fair amount of support in Bombay, excluding the Deccan, Madras, United Provinces and Behar. But it will cease to be a movement in which all Provinces participate and it is bound rapidly to dwindle. The situation is further complicated by the fierce antagonism between Hindus and Mohamedans that has been rekindled by the open partiality, which the Hindus generally believe, has been shown by the Government to the Mahomedans in working out the details of the Reform scheme. This antagonism has already led in upper India to a movement for the formation of a Hindu League.... The movement is frankly anti-Mahomedan, as the Moslem League is frankly anti-Hindu, and both are anti-national.'

'It is possible that if the details of the Reform Scheme are worked out in as liberal a spirit as that in which the Scheme itself was conceived, a new channel for the expression and even education of public opinion may be supplied by the Councils and in that case, the threatened disintegration of the Congress movement, though disastrous in itself, may prove less disastrous in practice than is at present feared.' (He wrote that Bengal moderates planed to secede from Congress if Mehta was made its President that year.) 57

It was under these circumstances that Gokhale carried on his work in the Imperial Council. He courageously defended Lala Lajpat Rai and the nine Bengal deportees, refused
to denounce the extremists and strongly opposed the Seditious Meetings Bill and the Press Bill (discussed earlier).

**Gokhale defends Lajpat Rai and the nine Bengali deportees**

Lala Lajpat Rai and Sardar Ajit Singh were held responsible for the explosive situation in Punjab and on 9th May 1907, Lajpat Rai was arrested and deported to Mandalay under Regulation III of 1818. A strong protest was raised against this inhuman act. Gokhale was well acquainted with Lajpat Rai and admired his ability and patriotism. On 21st May, Gokhale addressed a letter to the Press (The Times of India) strongly condemning the Government action and urging for his release. He attested that though Lalaji’s language was at times a trifle strong his aims and methods were strictly constitutional and that there was no substantial difference of opinion between the two of them. 58

On 1st November 1907, Gokhale asked some questions in the Imperial Council in connection with Lajpat Rai’s deportation. He brought to the Government’s notice that inspite of the Secretary of State’s statement in the Parliament that the relatives of Lajpat Rai could see him anytime, Lala Dhanpat Rai; his younger brother had been refused the permission to see him. Sir Harvey Adamson answered that this had been done because at that time it was considered undesirable that any such interview should take place. 59 Gokhale also asked as to why inspite of the statement of the Secretary of State in the House of Commons that Lajpat Rai was at liberty to communicate with his legal advisers and inspite of the fact that even ordinary criminals in jails were allowed to give instructions to their relatives and friends for bringing civil actions in their name, the Government had withheld from Lajpat Rai the letter of Mr. Dixit who was his solicitor. 60 Gokhale’s inquiry made it clear that Lajpat Rai was given a monthly allowance of Rs.200. He also urged that in view of the acquittal of Lala Hansraj and other pleaders at Rawalpindi, the government should review afresh the information on which they had acted in the case of Lajpat Rai. The government’s reply to this was in the negative. 61
On the same day, during the discussion of the Seditious Meetings Bill, Gokhale recorded his utter disgust against Lajpat Rai’s deportation, a leader loved and respected by all the Indians. He also defended all those arrested in the Rawalpindi case especially Lala Hansraj describing him as ‘a man as incapable of promoting disorder as any member sitting at this table.’ He urged the Government to deal strongly with those who had brought sufferings on these men by producing most untrustworthy and fabricated evidence.

While Gokhale publicly criticized the deportation, he also met Dunlop Smith, the private secretary to the Viceroy and ‘begged for the early release of Lajpat Rai.’ He also wrote one or two letters to Lajpat Rai at Mandalay which of course were not delivered to him and G. K. Devdhar (Gokhale’s associate at S.I.S.) also met Lajpat Rai at Mandalay station. Gokhale thus exerted himself both publicly and privately, to undo the grievous wrongs inflicted upon Lajpat Rai and consequently on the whole of India.

In 1909, he strongly objected to the deportation of the nine Bengali gentlemen under the Regulation of 1818 and also to the Under-Secretary of State for India Mr. T. R. Buchanan’s statement that among these men were ‘some leading instigators of crime’. He attested personal acquaintance with two of these deportees – Babu Krishna Kumar Mitter and Babu Aswini Kumar Dutt and testified them as men of highest character and deep piety and totally unconnected with crime. He urged the authorities for the release of these nine deportees.

Gokhale is thus seen to be opposed to deportation in principle. He is also seen keen on undoing the wrongs inflicted on his countrymen both publicly and privately. He supported Lajpat Rai though his leanings were more on the extremist side. Moreover, he was a strong supporter of the reforms. He feared that Lajpat Rai’s deportation would not only weaken the Moderate party but also decrease the importance of the forthcoming reforms. In 1909, the reforms had already been announced and when the general situation in the country was improving, he wanted the other causes of soreness like the deportations of the nine Bengalis also to be removed immediately.
Seditious Meetings Bill

The disturbances in Punjab and East Bengal instigated the Government to curb the seditious writings and speeches. The Government finding obvious connection between violent action and violent speaking issued the Ordinance No. 1 of 1907 to suppress such meetings in these two provinces in May. Since the limit of six months was to end in November and since the Government believed that the condition not only in these two provinces but also in the entire country had not improved during this period, it was necessary to further extend it through a legislative act. Hence, Sir Harvey Adamson introduced the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Bill on 18th October 1907 in a special session of the Imperial Legislative Council at Simla. The object of the Bill was to make better provision for the prevention of meetings likely to promote sedition or to cause a disturbance of public tranquility. The bill was rushed through the Council without allowing the public opinion any time for full consideration of its merits. The Select Committee held its meetings only on 22nd and 23rd and its report was presented in the Council on 25th. Dr. Rashbehary Ghose and Mr. Gokhale strongly opposing the provisions attached a minute of dissent to it.

The bill came to be severely opposed in the Indian press. Several protest meetings were held in all parts of the country. Pherozeshah Mehta as the President of Bombay Presidency Association wrote to the Secretary of Government of India, Legislative Department, condemning the bill.

In the Council, the bill was taken into consideration on 1st November. Recording his strong opposition Gokhale stated that the bill was a dangerous one and the only satisfactory way to improve it was to drop it. But more than the bill itself, he opposed the policy that lay behind it. Gokhale’s appropriately worded speech exhibits not only the actualities of the then prevalent political situation in the country but also the potentialities of future course of political events. Hence, it assumes importance.
After complaining that the bill was being rushed in a hot haste, by not allowing the public to state its objections to the measure and by holding the meeting at Simla where most of the Additional Members could not attend, he went on to criticize Adamson for his general assumption of danger to peace and law in the country without proving so with the help of any case or statistics. Gokhale on the other hand, had come well prepared with his data and proved that during the six months when the Ordinance was in force, there had been only one public meeting in Punjab and none in East Bengal and though the secret police had reported of several meetings held, there had certainly been no breach of peace at any one of them. Outside these two provinces, disturbances had occurred only at Coconada (Madras) and Calcutta. He thus urged that the Government had ample powers under the existing law to deal with such a situation and it was not necessary to saddle the whole country with such a repressive measure. He also suggested that the local governments move such legislation if necessary. Condemning the partition and the deportation of Lajpat Rai, he held the official reactionary policy responsible for the Indian discontent and the rise of new radical ideas. He also warned that the bill if passed would aggravate the situation further. Hence, the only remedy was a policy of conciliation.

Dr. Ghose while opposing the bill felt that the bill was against the liberal traditions of the government and would kill all political life in the country. Gokhale moved three amendments to the bill. In order to exclude the ordinary social parties from the scope of the bill, he proposed to call a meeting of more than 50 instead of 20 as a ‘public meeting’. Secondly, he proposed that the discussion of ‘political subject’ should not be barred so that the government could control only those meetings that discussed political grievances expressing sedition. Thirdly, he proposed that the bill’s life be limited to one year only (instead of 3 years). All the three amendments were rejected. The bill was passed into law by a Council of 12 persons. Gokhale, Dr. Ghose and even Tikka Sahib Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, who represented Punjab by the favour of Sir Denzil Ibbetson, voted against the bill. Regarding Tikka Sahib’s stand ‘India’ (November 8th 1907) remarked – ‘The public feeling must indeed be strong when a Punjab “Loyalist” joins forces with Calcutta and Poona against the Government.’ Appreciating Gokhale’s endeavors R. C. Dutt mentioned in a letter that he had surpassed his own past work.
Gokhale refuses to denounce the extremist party

While Sir Harvey Adamson assured the Indian members that the above bill would be operated only in exceptional circumstances, exceptional places and exceptional times of insecurity, he also blamed the moderate party for not assisting the authorities against the law-breakers. In the absence of evidence, the law-breakers could not be prosecuted. Hence, the government had to adopt a policy of prevention. He therefore considered the silence of the moderates responsible for the enactment of this measure of repression.

Gokhale promptly refuted the above charge against his party. While rejecting the terms ‘moderates’ and ‘extremists’, he strongly assailed the official notions about ‘sedition’ and blamed the official class for the existing sedition in the country. The undue delay caused in the Congress demand for reforms, the callousness towards the warnings of the moderates and the reactionary regime of Lord Curzon were responsible for the unrest in the country. He further believed that the denunciation of the extremists by the moderates was ‘largely a question of temperament’ and ‘not a very easy matter’. Citing the support given to the anti-Indian propaganda of certain Anglo-Indian newspapers even by some liberal officials, he identified the natural tendency to defend one’s own countrymen against the foreigners. His aim to work unitedly with all and to alienate none is easily discernible through his above stand. He continued his demand for conciliation.

‘Kesan’ criticized Gokhale’s above explanation as dissatisfactory. However, it should be duly considered that the utterances of the Council members were greatly restricted. Yet, Gokhale succeeded in making his party’s stand clear and striking the chords of unity among all the Indians.

The Seditious Meetings Bill becomes permanent (1911)

The bill passed in 1907 only awaited a pretext for universal application and this came in the form of Jackson Murder case (December 1909). In January 1909, it was extended to all major provinces though it was in force only in five districts. During this
time, there were several cases of powers under the bill being abused. For example in East Bengal three ordinary district conferences were prohibited. In one of the districts, a meeting proposed to be held by members of the depressed classes for the discussion of a social grievance was also disallowed. In some cases, the District Magistrate went the length of claiming the power to determine the actual wordings of the resolutions to be passed. 82

On 6th August 1910, Mr. Jenkins introduced the ‘Continuing Bill’ for the continuance of the above bill for five months i.e. upto 31st March 1911, after its expiry on 31st October 1910. The reason for it was the unanimous demand from the provincial governments and the Government of India’s conviction that the situation still called for its continuance. 83

Gokhale found the bill to be a prelude to another proposal to place the Act permanently on the Statute book after the formality of a discussion in full Council at Calcutta. He believed that this ‘Draconian’ Act conferred dangerously wide powers on the Executive, which if used at all, could paralyze all activity in the country. He repeated his earlier suggestion of undertaking such measures in the Provincial Councils instead of in the Imperial Council. 84

Mr. Mudholkar, Bhupendranath Basu, Malaviya, Thackersay, Mazharul Haque and Sachchidanand Sinha also opposed the bill while landholders like Nawab Abdul Majid, Kunwar Sir Ranbir Singh and Lt. Malik Umar Hyat Khan supported it. The debate on this occasion is noteworthy for two incidents, which indicate the working nature of the Council and the position of the Indians therein. The first was the passage of arms between Gokhale and Mr. Jenkins. The Home Member who was new to the office sarcastically stated that he was bored to death by the speeches of the non-officials. Greatly offended, Gokhale reminded him that he had no reason to be bored if he wanted to discharge his duties properly. He strongly objected to the tone adopted by Jenkins. 85 Minto, who did not wish to offend the Indian members had to patch up the matter by repeatedly and emphatically referring to the good sense and soundness of the speeches of the dissenting members. The episode received wide publicity in the columns of the native press, all criticizing Jenkins.
Dnyan Prakash (28th August) even published a cartoon, in which the Viceroy was represented as expostulating with Mr. Jenkins who was pictured as holding his own ears in a repentant mood. The incident points out three things – (1) Gokhale’s courage to defy wrong practices committed even by the officials in the Council, (2) the confidence that he had gained through eight years in the Council and (3) the respect that his views commanded from the Government, as Minto tried to pacify the Indians.

The second incident was with reference to Mr. Haque who stood up several times to speak but was not permitted to do so by the Viceroy as he thought that Haque would speak in favour of the bill. This incident shows the complete Muslim support for all the Government measures and the Government assuming so to be the case.

When Lord Hardinge became the new Viceroy, the first Act to be passed under him was the Seditious Meetings Bill. The condition in the country was fast improving but the Government felt that the danger was not over and wanted to obtain security against the seditionists and hence the above bill was introduced in order to place it permanently on the statute book. However, certain modifications were made like – (1) Previous sanction of Governor General would be required to proclaim any area under the Act. Earlier this power was invested with the local governments. 2) The definition that a gathering of more than 20 persons was a public meeting was withdrawn. 3) Provision for banning all meetings that discuss any ‘political subject’ was withdrawn. Moreover, the notice of public meeting was to be given to District Magistrate instead of the District Superintendent of Police.

It can be noted that two of the amendments proposed by Gokhale in 1907 were now incorporated in the bill. But despite all its sugar coatings and emollients, the bill maintained its repressive nature and this time Gokhale’s opposition – both in the Select Committee and in the Council – was to the placing of the Act permanently on the statute – book. When the bill was taken up for consideration on 20th March 1911, he called it a ‘precautionary measure, not required by any immediate necessities’ and outlined the possibilities of the powers under the Act being abused by the district authorities and the police. He urged that the duration of the bill be limited to 3 or 5 years only. He also clarified that the Press
and the Platform, as instruments of sedition, stood on different positions, the former affecting the individual concerned only while the latter affecting all the people put under the Act. Hence, his stand regards the two bills (Press Bill and the Seditious Meetings Bill) was different.91

The other non-officials like Basu, Malaviya, Mudholkar, Sachchidananda Sinha, Haque and Subba Rao also opposed the bill but some supported it as it was much milder than the 1907 Act and they considered it necessary to suppress sedition.

With official majority, the bill was passed and it assumed a permanent nature after three discussions in the Council. Gokhale made a spirited opposition to it at all stages.

General Political situation between 1910 – 1915 and Gokhale’s stand

The Morley-Minto combination had formulated the double-edged policy of repression and conciliation. The Government's fatal policy of being always in full armour and armed with all possible deadly weapons, made the innocents suffer and alienated the masses. The real causes of sedition not tackled, the repressive measures, as Gokhale had foreseen, aggravated the situation further.

However, the six-year administration of Lord Hardinge (1910-16) extending into the beginning of World War I was marked by improvements and progress, with some exceptions of course. In December 1911, King Emperor George V and the Queen visited India and proclaimed at a Grand Durbar the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi and the reunification of the two Bengals, thus settling an issue that had caused great discontent in the country. Although a bomb thrown at Delhi severely wounded the Viceroy, he refused to take revenge. Instead, he supported Gandhi and Gokhale in their struggle against the anti-Indian policy of the South African Government.

Though the reforms did not satisfy him, Gokhale wanted to take full advantage of the newly acquired powers in the Council for constructive work. Lord Hardinge too wanted
a political truce. The atmosphere was thus congenial for constructive work which for
gokhale was—‘to devote all our energies (i.e. of S.I.S) now to educating and organizing
public opinion on the necessity of universal elementary education, on technical, industrial
and agriculture education, improved sanitation, the growth of co-operative movement, the
relief of agricultural indebtedness and the development of local self government... We
cannot expect any large constitutional changes for the next ten years or so now; meanwhile
the work we have taken in hand will amply repay itself and prepare the ground for the next
advance.’ 92 It was precisely on these lines that gokhale advanced in the Council too. In the
ensuing years, he moved several resolutions for the improvement of the country’s finances,
advancement of local self-government, removing the grievances of Indians in South Africa
and the spread of universal primary education. His exemplary work won him the title of the
‘Leader of the Opposition’. Most of the resolutions introduced by the non-officials were
rejected but the general tone in the Council had undergone a change. The earlier rebuffs and
mockery in which the officials took great pleasure had subsided. And the general
atmosphere was one of sympathy and co-operation.

During this period, gokhale initiated or participated in the debates over the
following questions.

Criminal Tribes Bill

The above bill intended to ‘amend the law relating to the registration, surveillance
and control of Criminal Tribes’ in accordance with the recommendation of the Police
Commission. It was introduced on 22nd July 1910 by Mr. Jenkins. The Select Committee of
the bill included gokhale. During the final discussion on the bill on 1st March 1911, Lt.
Malik Umar Hyat Khan remarked that the members of the secret societies engaged in
preaching sedition and committing violence could be easily brought under the provisions of
the bill. 93

Strongly objecting to the above statement, gokhale made it clear that political
preachers who created unrest, members of the secret societies and sanyasins and such
others were not members of Criminal Tribes hence the bill was not applicable to them. He criticized Lt. Khan for such an interpretation of the bill and raising the issue on the Select Committee and again in the Council. Such irresponsible statements could create confusion and ill will among the people. Mr. Jenkins pacifying Gokhale declared that the political preachers did not come under the scope of the bill and the bill was then passed.

Many of the Indian members in the Council were reluctant to oppose the Government and some (like Lt. Khan) even went further than the Government stand in order to appease the officials. Gokhale was, obviously not one among such men. His stand, in this case, also reveals his patriotic sentiment, when he objects to the labeling of the Indian revolutionaries as criminals. Though he himself was completely against violence of any kind he was of the opinion that the revolutionaries were patriots. Their methods were different but the goal was same.

Employment in Public Services

On 17th March 1911, Mr. Subba Rao, the Madras representative in Council, moved a resolution recommending the appointment of a Commission of officials and non-officials to consider the claims of the Indians to higher and more extensive employment in the Public Services. In an effective speech, he outlined a policy to be followed by the Government which if adopted could include appointment of Indians to higher posts, holding of simultaneous competitive exams in England and India, promotion from lower service to the higher one and provision of technical training to qualify Indians for technical appointments.

With the increase in the number of English educated Indians, they had become conscious of their inferior status compared to the Europeans in all the Government services. This sort of invidious distinctions based on racial and political considerations found echoes both in and out of the Council. To Gokhale, it was an important question not only due to its social and moral implications but also because it determined whether the British Government in India was progressive or not. In his evidence before the Welby Commission
in 1897, he had emphasized the deterioration of the Indian race owing to such a policy. In 1889 Congress at Bombay, he seconded the resolution on simultaneous public exams moved by Mr. Salem Ramaswamy Mudaliar. In the Council too he often urged for larger Indian association on the grounds of national prestige and self-respect. He urged so both on political and economic grounds. The economic aspect is discussed in Chapter IV.

Supporting Subba Rao’s resolution, Gokhale urged for a fresh inquiry into the whole matter as twenty-five years had lapsed since the appointment of the last Public Service Commission. He demanded the abolition of the disparaging distinction between the Imperial and Provincial services and ascertained the importance of competition, instead of nomination, for such selections. He, especially pointed out to the dissatisfactory position of the Indians in the Medical and the Railway Departments and the great set back received by them in the Education and the Public Works Departments. He pinpointed the inferior status of the distinguished scientist Dr. P. C. Ray owing to this system, which he said caused bitterness not only among the professors but also among the entire student community. Finally, he urged for a quick solution to the problem that alone could remove the discontent in the land.

Nawab Saiyad Bahadur, Mudholkar, Sachchidananda Sinha and Malaviya also supported the resolution while Umar Hyat Khan opposed it. Mr. Earle expressed the Government’s desire to associate more Indians in the administration and promised an enquiry into the matter though not through the proposed Commission. Due to the sympathetic approach of the Government, Subba Rao withdrew his resolution to put it again the next year.

Police Administration

On 28th February 1912, Mr. Bhupendranath Basu moved a resolution recommending the establishment of a committee of officials and non-officials to inquire into police administration in India and the necessity of amending the law relating to confessions in criminal cases.
The motion was opposed by many Indian members on the ground that the work of such committees was generally useless and that not much time had lapsed since the appointment of the last Police Commission (in 1902.) These were Dadabhoy, Chitnavis, Nawab Abdul Majid, Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Malaviya, the last two giving their partial consent.

However, Gokhale supported the motion, firstly because an enquiry into the manner in which confessions were obtained and the general unreliability of such confessions was required. Secondly, he felt that the operations of the Criminal Investigation Department required revision. This department, established in 1905, was responsible of several wrongs done to innocent men, causing a lot of irritation and bitterness. The department, he said, mainly consisted of uneducated and unscrupulous men, who worked in most offensive and clumsy manner sending secret reports that were mostly unfounded and unreliable. He complained that the members of his society including him were being watched and shadowed most clumsily. Since the discontent in the land had subsided, he urged for an immediate inquiry into the matter.

During the debate, Sir Gangadharrao Chitnavis opposed the resolution and supported the C.I.D though he himself had been its victim, mainly, as Gokhale said, ‘to earn high official appreciation’. Thus, while there were members who lacked the courage to oppose the Government, there were others who strongly objected to Mr. Madge’s speech, which referred to Indians as immoral.

The Government’s response was sympathetic and it promised an inquiry into the whole question of C.I.D hence Basu withdrew his resolution. During the budget debate the same year, Gokhale attempted to reduce the allotment for police purposes, once again attacking the C.I.D (discussed in Chapter IV).
Resolution on establishment of District Councils

The expansion of local self-government was a subject close to Gokhale’s heart. As a step towards its further advancement, he moved in 1912, two resolutions recommending the establishment of advisory district councils and increasing the resources of the local bodies (this is discussed in Chapter IV).

Justice Ranade had urged the importance of advisory district boards very strongly. In his Presidential Speech at Congress in 1905, Gokhale also placed it in his list of ‘immediate demands’. He elaborated his scheme further in his evidence before the Decentralization Commission in 1908. He wrote – ‘The cry of the people everywhere is that the Car of Administration should not merely roll over their bodies but that they themselves should be permitted to pull at the ropes’. Though the idea was discussed in the Commission it was not taken up seriously. However, a majority of the non-official side favoured it and a small but important official class also supported it. In 1912, he brought up this question in the Council.

On 27th February, he moved a resolution asking for the establishment of a District Council, as far as possible, in every district in the different provinces, composed of not more than 9 members, partly elected and partly nominated, whose function was to be merely advisory, to begin with, but the Collector was bound to consult it on all important matters.

The three evils of the then existing system of District Administration, he said, were its secrecy, its purely bureaucratic character and its departmental delays and hence the requirements of the situation were (1) more expeditious government on the spot, (2) association of educated classes with the administration and (3) ventilation of the local grievances in a responsible manner in the district itself.

His proposal was to set up Advisory Council in each district, small in size (not more than 9 or 10 members), more than half of which (preferably 2/3rd) was to be elected and the
remaining to be nominated by the Collector. In the beginning it was to be an advisory body though if the experiment proved a success, more powers could be entrusted to it. It was to meet once a month and dispose of a lot of business on the spot thus avoiding endless delays that were being caused then.\textsuperscript{106} He also stated a list of subjects on which these councils could advice the Collector.

Gokhale’s scheme intended to avoid the Collector’s autocracy and free him from excessive secretariat control. This would not only improve the Collector’s position but also bring the administration in close touch with the people.

Among the Indians, except for G. M. Chitnavis, the rest extended their wholehearted support for the resolution Chitnavis who had already made up his mind to oppose the motion and had come with a ready written speech was strongly criticized for this action by Gokhale.

The official opposition to the resolution was based on five major planks- (1) that informal consultation was better than a formal one (2) that it was difficult to get properly qualified representatives (3) that the efficiency of the district administration would suffer (4) that the already existing District Boards and Municipalities could be utilized for the purpose and (5) that the time was not yet ripe for such a change.\textsuperscript{107}

In his reply, Gokhale ably refuted all the above charges. Sir Reginald Craddock who gave a vigourous speech in opposition seemed unconvincing and Gokhale blamed that he had not ‘really cared to understand our proposal’. On a division, 14 voted for and 32 against the motion. The resolution was thus rejected.

**Delegation Bill Dropped**

The above bill was introduced by Sir John Jenkins in 1911 (October) and was referred to the Select Committee by Mr. Syed Ali Imam on 10\textsuperscript{th} January 1912. It was a measure designed to facilitate delegation of executive powers and duties in respect of non-
controversial matter. It was based on the report of the Royal Decentralization Commission. Gokhale, who was included in the Select Committee, considered the Bill as asking the ‘Legislature to grant a blank cheque to the executive in certain matters’ though with certain safeguards. Hence, he felt that a close scrutiny of the bill was required in the Select Committee.  

The very first meeting of the Select Committee however, disclosed strong difference of opinion and it was adjourned sine die. The non-officials objected mainly to Clauses 2 and 3 of the bill, clause 2 enabling the Governor General in Council to delegate any power or duty to any authority subordinate to him and the Clause 3 containing similar provisions with regard to the local governments.

Owing to this strong opposition the bill was finally dropped. It proved to be a victory for Gokhale and his friends.

Separate Electorates and the Resolution on Council Regulations

The emergence of Muslim separatism was an important event of the first decade of the 20th century. The British Government was anxious at pulling back the 62 million of Muslims from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition. The Muslims, on the other hand, feared Hindu domination owing to the educational backwardness of their own race. This led to Anglo – Muslim pact in the form of Simla Deputation (1906) when the Muslims obtained the recognition of their being an important minority, entitled to representation in legislative and other administrative bodies commensurate with their importance. In return, the Muslims declared their loyalty to the British Empire. They also formed themselves into a separate political association called the Indian Moslem League, for venting their grievances. Keeping their promise, the Government bestowed the boons of separate electorates and excessive representation on the Muslim community through the Morley-Minto reforms. Thus, the reforms came to be strongly criticized by the Hindus. Hence, in 1911 Madan Mohan Malaviya, a veteran Indian leader of North India, moved a resolution
in the Council to correct this imbalance in representation. It will be apt here to first discuss Gokhale’s views on the subject.

Gokhale had imbibed the all-encompassing or the comprehensive spirit of his master Ranade. One of the seven vows which the members of S.I.S had to take was to regard all Indians as brothers irrespective of caste and creed. \(^{110}\) Therefore, Gokhale believed in ‘common nationality’ and expected his countrymen to call themselves Indians first and Hindus, Muslims, Parsees or Christians afterwards.

On the eve of the Morley-Minto reforms, Gokhale who had an important share in the shaping of these reforms was criticized for supporting separate electorates. He himself did not conceal his favour for special electorates for important minorities but wanted ‘such electorates to provide not the whole of the representation to which the communities were entitled but only so much of it as was necessary to redress the deficiencies and inequalities of general elections; and he wanted the same treatment to be extended to other important minorities than Mahomedans, where necessary’. \(^{111}\) So, he first wanted elections on a territorial basis in which all communities without distinction of race or creed would participate, and then special supplementary election to be held to secure the fair and adequate representation of such important minorities as had received less than their full share in the general election. He urged this view publicly in his budget speech of 1909.\(^{112}\)

In his private correspondence of this period also, Gokhale is seen to sympathize with the Muslim aspirations. He considered their political awakening as an important step towards national regeneration and unity. To Sir Lawrence, he wrote – ‘Personally I have always been, as you are aware, in favour of separate Mohamedan representation. To my mind the most important thing just now is not to let any section feel any real or reasonable grievance, so that the new arrangements may be started with the utmost goodwill on all sides. And as regards Mohamedan representation particularly, what I value above everything else is to free the community from dependence upon Government nomination. When this is done, their interests are generally so far identical with ours that they are bound before long to come and range themselves by our side.’ \(^{113}\)
The later events proved that Gokhale had entertained false hopes and that he had failed to foresee the Morley-Minto reforms as the first sign of the country's disunification but optimistic and idealistic as Gokhale was he did not consider the reforms as an impediment but rather a step forward towards Hindu Muslim unity.

It should also be noted here that in 1901, on the eve of the debate on Mofussil Municipalities Bill in Bombay Council, Gokhale had strongly expressed himself against sectional representation. He had not only emphasized the evil of disunity that would accompany such sectional representation but had also warned that once the seed was sown it would extend itself to different sections of the Hindu community as well. 114 From this stand in 1901, Gokhale vacillated to complete support for special electorates in 1909 and openly opposed Malaviya's resolution in 1911. This gradual change in his attitude was obviously due to a strong pressure form the Muslim communalists, the government's support for the Muslim demands, the inability of the Hindu leaders to combat both these forces and Gokhale's personal belief that certain concessions to the Muslims could lead to Hindu-Muslim unity. Later on, even what Gokhale considered as absurd limits of carrying sectional representation to castes among Hindus was also reached. But in 1909, he was severely criticized for his association with the reforms. However, his scheme (mentioned earlier) was not accepted. The regulations drafted for the Indian Councils Bill gave the Muslims not only special electorates but also excessive representation and special franchise rights. This gravely disappointed him. In one of his private letters he wrote – ‘There is no doubt that except in Mahomedan circles the regulations have caused very great dissatisfaction throughout the country... Thus it is quite plain to everybody that the Mahomedan representation in the Viceroy's Council is so excessive as to be not only unjust but monstrously unjust... But what hurts the other Communities even more than this excessive representation of Mahomedans is the great difference in the franchise conferred on Mahomedans and on others. What I, however particularly dislike is the manner in which representation has been so arranged as to neutralize in practice the non-official majorities that have been created in Provincial Councils.’ 115 However, once the Regulations had been made and the new constitution had started its work, Gokhale did not wish to distribute its working.
On 24th January 1911, Malaviya moved a resolution recommending that a Committee of official and non-official members be appointed to re-consider the regulations promulgated under the Indian Councils Act of 1909, so as to remove all legitimate complaints on the score of inequality in the treatment of the various sections of his Majesty’s subjects, and in regard to some of the disqualifications and restrictions placed on the choice of candidates seeking election to the Councils; also to ensure that the provision for a non-official majority in the Provincial Councils shall be more effective in practice.¹¹⁶

In a strong and deliberate speech, Malaviya condemned the over-representation of the Muslims and the Zamindars. He stated that if special electorates were granted, the Muslims should be elected only through them and not permitted to take part in elections by mixed electorates. He wanted their representation in proportion to the total population and not on the basis of their so-called ‘political importance’.¹¹⁷ He also pointed out to the privileged position of the Muslims with regards to franchise rights. He asked for the revision of the stringent and unreasonable disqualifications, which prevented a person form contesting for the election and demanded for effective participation of non-official majorities in the Provisional Councils.¹¹⁸

All the Muslim members entered into an emphatic protest against the resolution, calling themselves politically important because they had been the rulers before the British advent. Among those who opposed were Nawab Abdul Majid, Lt. Malik Umar Hyat Khan, Maulavi Shamsul Huda, Raja of Mahmudabad, and Nawab Saiyid Muhammad Sahib Bahadur. The Maharaja of Burdwan supported the Zamindar’s representation. The only Muslim member who opposed sectional representation was Mazharul Haque who said that Muslims should be educated to disapprove of it. Bhupendranath Basu strongly stated that the middle class (i.e. the educated class) had no voice in the Councils owing to the over-representation of the landed aristocracy.

During the debate some of the members went into undignified and unbecoming personalities and sneers at their colleagues. Mr. Jenkins, the Home Member, too indulged in undeserved taunts towards Malaviya.
Gokhale made it clear that he was not against special representation of Muslims or landlords but objected to their over-representation in the Councils. It was not possible to snatch away from the Muslims what they had been given only a short time back and it was better to make the best of the situation in the larger interests of the country. It was not the numerical strength but the spirit of work that mattered in the Councils. While he supported the issues of differences in franchise and qualifications for candidates held up by Malaviya, he earnestly appealed to his colleague not to press the resolution to division for the harmonious co-operation of both the communities.

As Mazharul Haque said, Gokhale ‘struck the right note in the Council’. The Muslim members greeted his speech with applause and Malaviya decided to withdraw his resolution. Gokhale thus tried to patch up the differences between the two communities and encompass them in the bonds of ‘common nationality’ based on common tradition common disabilities, common hopes and aspirations.

The Government made it clear that special electorates for Muslims was a settled fact and unless the Muslims themselves demanded for its removal, the Government would not alter the position. The other changes recommended would be fully considered when the regulations would be revised. Finally, the resolution was withdrawn.

Gokhale’s stand was strongly criticized by a section of the native press. The Indu of Bombay (26th January) wrote – ‘And when he urged that the method of working in the Council was more important than the personnel, may we ask how can men work smoothly when smarting under positive wrongs?’ Kesari (31st January) deemed it the duty of the leader of the opposition to support Malaviya who was voicing the feelings of the entire nation on the subject. It asked that while Gokhale’s view was a liberal one, how many Europeans and Muslims reciprocated similar feelings towards Hindus.

On this subject Gokhale courageously stood by his convictions in spite of strong opposition. Gokhale’s stand was based on his vision of Hindu Muslim unity. Sarojini Naidu
notes in her reminiscences that Gokhale was aware that such a union would not come for a long time to come but he wanted to keep his faith and work for it.

Resolutions on indentured labour system

An important question that Gokhale took up in the Council during this period was that of the indentured labour system, especially that in South Africa. This question had engaged his mind right from 1896, when M.K. Gandhi had come down to India to gain the support of the Indian leaders for his struggle in South Africa. The rapport established between the two leaders is well known and Gandhi came to regard Gokhale as his ‘political master’. It was during this stay in India, that Gandhi’s pamphlet published in India about the conditions of Indians in South Africa (which was wrongly reported in S. Africa), created undue resentment among the Europeans there and all this culminated into a cowardly and disgraceful attempt to lynch Gandhi in the streets of Durban. This provoked Gokhale to write a strongly worded article in ‘The India’ of June 1897 in which he effectively outlined the inferior social and political status of the Indians in the British Empire. He wrote—‘...after all, we are only British slaves, and not British subjects, and that it is idle on our part to expect justice or fair treatment where it does not suit the interests of Englishmen to be just or fair.’

Gandhi continued the struggle against the Indian discrimination and in July 1907 launched the passive resistance (Satyagraha) campaign. Gokhale addressed several meetings to rouse public support for the Satyagrahis. He believed that the Indians in South Africa were fighting not for themselves but for the honour and the future interests of the motherland and hence urged Indian support for their struggle. He analyzed the causes of the struggle to be the inferior status of the Indians in their own country. It was therefore a struggle for equal treatment with the British. He supported the passive resistance started by Gandhi calling it not only legitimate but also a duty resting on all self-respecting persons. In the Congress session at Lahore, 1909, he moved a resolution in support of the struggle. Again and again, he made appeals for funds and financial support for the struggle. That
such monitory assistance was dissatisfactory is clear through his speeches and through his private correspondence as well.

On 25th February 1910, he opened the subject for debate in the Council by moving a resolution to prohibit the recruitment of indentured labour in British India for the Colony of Natal. It was also the first resolution to be moved under the 1909 Act. His object in raising the debate was firstly to call the attention of the Council to the position of British Indians in South Africa and secondly to strengthen the hands of the Government of India in applying a remedy to the situation.

In a well-organized speech, he described the accurate position of the Indian community in different parts of South Africa with special reference to their disabilities and indignities in Natal and Transvaal. He brought to the Council’s notice the ill-treatment of the indentured labourers by the employers, the imposition of an annual license of three sterling on the ex-indentured community – a heavy economic burden which had driven men to crime and women to a life of shame – and the harsh and unjust treatment of the Indian traders who were deprived of their political and municipal franchise and also arbitrarily refused their licenses to trade. He, therefore advocated the complete abolition of this indentured system, not only because the system itself was very near to slavery but also because it tended steadily to lower the whole position of the free Indian population. However, from practical standpoint, this was an extreme view to take and hence he suggested the alternative remedy i.e. the adoption of his resolution. The Natal industry would be paralyzed if the Indian labour was withdrawn and this would indicate to the South African government the deep Indian resentment against their anti-Asiatic policy.

The Indian members stood stoutly behind Gokhale. Mr. Jinnah and Subba Rao strongly approved the resolution. Among the others who supported were Dadabhoy, Chitnavis, Sardar Partab Singh, Thackersay, Mudholkar, Raja of Burdwan, Nawab Saiyid Muhammad, Mazharul Haque, Bhupendranath Basu, Sachindananda Sinha, Mr. Guznavi and the Raja of Dighapatia. Mr. Maxwell read the Government’s reply accepting the resolution, which was then passed amidst loud applause. It was a great triumph for the
Indians. The Natal Zoroastrian Association and the Natal Indian Congress congratulated Gokhale. George A. Hay, a member of Transvaal Legislative Assembly expressed a desirability of an independent enquiry regards the question and promised to help.

On 23rd March, Mr. Robertson, Secretary of Department of Commerce and Industry, introduced a bill enabling the Government to prohibit emigration to any country where treatment accorded to British Indian subject was not satisfactory. On 3rd January 1911, the Government announced its decision to stop Indian emigration to Natal from 1st July. Gokhale welcomed the announcement and congratulated the Government on the step taken.

Though the Government declared its intention to prohibit emigration, it adopted a bad device of defeating its intention by postponing the enforcement for six months. During the period, the Natal planters sent out their agents for recruiting Indian labours before June 30th. The Indian press raised a strong protest against this and effectively highlighted the ill treatment of the Indians in South Africa. Gokhale also kept the matter to the forefront by asking questions on it in the Council – on 5th August 1910, 27th February 1912 and 7th March 1912. Meanwhile, Gokhale was receiving several letters from different parts of the world describing the pitiable conditions of the Indians there. Gokhale had emerged as the patron of the Indians abroad and as such was expected to make the Government aware of their position. Anagarika Dharmapala wrote to Gokhale about the problems faced by the Ceylonese while Sunder...(incomplete) wrote of problems in Canada. Similarly letters came from Zanzibar and Mauritius.

Finally, on 4th March 1912, Gokhale moved a resolution to prohibit the recruitment of Indian labourers under contract of indenture, whether for employment at home or in any British Colony. It was a step further to his earlier resolution.

In his speech, Gokhale expanded the problems of indentured system existing in West Indies (British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica), Surinam, Fiji, Straits settlement and the 5 districts in Assam and the miserable conditions of the system of re-indenture in Natal, Mauritius and Fiji. He raised five objections to the system. Firstly, the system was
iniquitous, the emigrant not being aware of the penal nature of the contract. Secondly, the safeguards provided to prevent hardships and injustice to the emigrants were in actual practice illusory; the two officers namely the Protector of Immigrants and the Magistrate appointed to look after the interest of the immigrants were officers of the Colonial Governments and hence more sympathetic towards the planters. Thirdly, the system had caused vast and terrible amount of suffering during its 75 years of its existence resulting in high mortality rate. Fourthly, frightful immorality was inseparable from the system, so much so, that a considerable part of the population in some of these colonies was practically illegitimate in its origin. Lastly, the system was degrading to the people of India from a national point of view. Gokhale, therefore, appealed to the Government to come out of its grooves of neutrality and take up responsibility in this matter.

India was the only country that supplied indentured labour at that time and thus marked out for this degradation. Gokhale emphasized upon the Government of India to keep apart the differences at home and to support the Indians and stand up for their dignity, honour and national pride outside the country. He asked the Government not to make the mistake of ignoring the Indian sentiment of self-respect. Thus, in a way, he asked the Government of India to alter its overseas or foreign policy.

The absolute unanimity of the Indian opinion on the matter was striking. Among those who gave supportive speeches were Thackersay, Muhammad Shafi, Chitnavis, Subba Rao, Mazharul Haque, Mudholkar, Malaviya and Umar Hayat Khan Tiwana. To the Council’s surprise, the Government adopted a very feeble defense of the policy of non-possumus. However, it promised to inquire as to why the penal nature of the contract was not mentioned in the agreements.

It should be noted that on division, the resolution was defeated – 22 voting for it and 33 against it. The Government majority was thus not more than eleven and the non-official minority was the largest yet recorded on a proposition not accepted by the Government. It clearly indicated how the entire country felt on the matter. It was thus a moral victory for Gokhale and the non-official members. It was clear that the system of indentured labour
was doomed. In July 1913, the system ceased to operate in Assam and in 1916 it was completely prohibited.

Throughout the Indian struggle in South Africa, Gokhale supported Gandhi by seeking Indian support both publicly and privately, by bringing up the matter before the Council through several interpellations and privately before the Viceroy and other government officials and by keeping the matter to the forefront in England through his influential friends in London like M. de. P. Webb, Lord Ampthill, Lord Crewe, L. W. Ritch, Rev. F. B. Meyer and so on. Mr. Morrell asked questions on the subjects in the Parliament. In 1912, Gokhale undertook a tour of South Africa, which proved fruitful. When the Satyagraha was resumed in 1913 and the Union government tried to suppress it ruthlessly, Gokhale played a vital role by touring India to gain Indian support for the cause, demanding a ban on the import of the coal from S. Africa and other retaliatory methods and collecting funds for the Satyagrahis. In November, he called for an emergent meeting of the Imperial Council to consider the situation in S. Africa. But the Government refused it on the grounds that the matter was to be primarily dealt with by the Executive Committee and would receive most careful attention from the Government. Lord Hardinge supported the Indian cause. Gokhale played a vital role as a mediator between the Viceroy and Gandhi during the provisional agreement that was finally carried out between Gandhi and the S. African Government. In his ‘Political Will and Testament’ - a document drawn up by Gokhale just two days before his death, he had included a clause that at the end of the War, German East Africa, if conquered form the Germans, should be reserved for Indian colonization.

The question of Indian emigrants thus remained uppermost in his thoughts up to the end. He succeeded in mobilizing not only the Indian public opinion but also the Government of Indian’s opinion on the matter.
Conclusion

As far as political issues were concerned, Gokhale supported only those official measures that were urgently necessary to deal with actual or threatened disturbances like the Press Bill. However, as regards precautionary measures, he refused to support the Government. Simultaneously, he tried to divert the official policy to a programme of public welfare and so initiated or participated in debates on constructive measures. He also attempted to strike the chords of unity among the different political groups in India and between the Hindus and the Muslims. On the question of indentured system, he based his arguments on the grounds of justice and humanity and challenged the government's policy regarding external affairs. On this question, he also differed from his master. While Ranade in his paper on Indian Emigration had spoken of emigration as a partial solution to the economic problems of India, Gokhale made efforts to stop Indian emigration. His chief aim was thus moral and material well-being of the common man and unity among the Indians.
Chapter III

Gokhale in the Imperial Council – Political and Administrative Issues

Footnotes


2. D. E. Wacha to G. K. Gokhale, 26th February 1899, Sr. No. 569 – 30, Gokhale Papers Reel No. 11.

3. G. K. Gokhale to Bennett, 8th March 1901, Sr. No. 203-25, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.

4. Ibrahim Rahimtoola to G. K. Gokhale, 26th March 1903, Sr. No. 237 – 3, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 5.

5. G. K. Gokhale to Ibrahim Rahimtoola, 15th April 1903, Sr. No. 203 – 13, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.

6. H. S. Dikshit to G. K. Gokhale, 21st March and also in 25th March 1903, File No. 161, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.

7. Ibrahim Rahimtoola to G. K. Gokhale, 6th July 1905, Sr. No. 237 – 6, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 5.


10. G. K. Gokhale to Vamanrao, 5th May 1908, Sr. No. 203-104, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.


12. Ibid., P. 196.

13. Ibid.

15. G. K. Gokhale to Natesan, 2nd October 1906, Sr. No. 203 – 86, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.
16. Ibid.
19. Ibid., P. 26-27.
25. Ibid., P. 328.
28. A conference of Government Railway officials was held at Delhi on 2nd January 1903 where it was decided that the Indians would be debarred from all the posts carrying a salary of Rs. 30 and above per month. The report of the Conference including the names of the officers who attended it and the resolutions passed were reproduced in the Amrit Bazar Patrika of 16th March 1903, from the columns of a vernacular newspaper called ‘Sanjibani’. On 25th March, both Gokhale and Sri Ram Bahadur inquired in the Council about the possibility of larger employment of Anglo-Indians on railways when Mr. A. T. Arundel replied that no official sanction had been ordered on the proceedings of the above-mentioned conference. However, the Government was annoyed at the publication of these circulars and hence decided to gag the newspapers. Ibid., P. 87 – 90.
29. Ibid., P. 280-81.
30. Ibid., P. 281-82.
31. Ibid., P. 293.
32. India, 15th January 1904.
33. *India*, 22nd January 1904.


35. Ibid., P. 102.

36. *India*, 11th March 1904.


38. Ibid., P. 63.


41. Ibid., P. 87.

42. A letter by Minto to Morley, 2nd May 1907, Quoted in: Mary Countess of Minto, *India: Minto and Morley*, (London: 1934), P. 123.


44. C. Y. Chintamani to Srinivas Sastri, 2nd July 1925, Sr. No. 520 – 4 and also by S. P. Sinha to Secretary, S.I.S, 12th April 1921, Sr. No. 520 – 3, *Gokhale Papers*, Reel No. 10.


47. Ibid., P. 87.


51. Ibid., P. 134.


53. Ibid., P. 556.

54. Ibid., P. 336 – 37
The 'Daily Express' had reported a story of an interview between Lajpat Rai and the Amir of Afghanistan in which the former had submitted 'a plot for the delivery of India from the British Raj.' Hence Lajpat Rai's son and some of his friends wished to bring on behalf of Lajpat Rai a civil action of defamation in England against the conductors of 'Daily Express' and with a view to obtain the necessary power of attorney from Lajpat Rai instructed Messers. Dixit and Dhanjishah, Solicitors, Bombay, to communicate with him. However, Mr. Dixit's letter to Lalaji in the matter was not delivered to him. Gokhale took up this matter in the Council. Ibid., P.35

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., P. 43.

63. G. K. Gokhale to Sir Dunlop Smith, 10th June 1907 enclosed with Minto's letter to Morley, 18th September 1907, Minto Papers, Quoted in: Dr. K. K. Sharma, Life and times of Lajpat Rai, (Ambala: 1975), P. 119.

64. Lajpat Rai, The story of my deportation, (Lahore: 1908), P. 103.

65. Ibid., P. 55 – 56.


68. Ibid., P. 31.

69. The Times of India, 24th October 1907, P. 5.

70. Procds., Imperial Council, 1907 – 08, vol. XLVI, P. 46.

71. Ibid., P. 39 – 40.

72. Ibid., P. 41.
73. Ibid., P. 46.
74. Ibid., P. 54.
75. Ibid., P. 69 – 70.
76. R. C. Dutt to G. K. Gokhale, 16th November 1907, Sr. No. 168 – 18, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.
77. Procds., Imperial Council, 1907 – 08, Vol. XLVI, P. 60.
78. Ibid., P. 64.
79. Ibid., P. 75.
80. Ibid., P. 76.
83. Ibid., P. 27.
84. Ibid., P. 28 – 31.
85. Ibid., P. 69.
89. Ibid., P. 557.
90. Ibid., P. 559.
91. Ibid., P. 574.
92. G. K. Gokhale to William Wedderburn, 29th April 1910, Sr.No. 203, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 4.
94. Ibid., P. 256.
95. Ibid., P. 500.
98. Ibid., P. 510 – 11.
99. Ibid., P. 522.
101. Ibid., P. 279.
102. Ibid., P. 280.
105. Ibid., P. 227.
107. Ibid., P. 231.
108. Ibid., P. 76.
109. *India*, 7th June 1912.
111. Ibid., P. 309.
112. *Procds.,* Imperial Council, 1908-09, Vol. XLVII, P.211.
117. Ibid., P. 135.
118. Ibid., P. 137 – 138.

119. Ibid., P. 147 – 148.

120. Ibid., P. 154.

121. Indu of Bombay, 26th January, Report on Native Newspapers, No. 4 of 1911, P. 11.


124. Ibid., P. 469.


127. Ibid., P. 246.

128. Sr. No. 242 – 27 and 242 – 28 respectively, both dated 18th April 1910, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 5.

129. George A. Hay to G. K. Gokhale, 1st March 1910, Sr. No. 242 – 25, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 5.

130. Anagarika Dharmapala to G. K. Gokhale, 16th January 1912, Sr. No. 242 – 55, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 5.

131. Sunder… (incomplete name) to G. K. Gokhale, 10th May 1912, Sr. No. 242 – 56, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 5.

132. Sr. No. 242 – 342 and 343 respectively, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 6.


134. Ibid., P. 365 – 368.

135. Ibid., P. 391.

136. Sr. No. 242 – 158 and 159, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 6.
137. Private Secretary to G. K. Gokhale, undated, Sr. No. 242 – 268, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 6.

138. A Rough draft of a Reform Scheme by Gokhale dated 18th February 1915, Sr. No. 428 – 10, Gokhale Papers, Reel No. 9.