

MODERN INDIAN POLITICS
AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

The following works are reviewed in this article:

T. V. PARVATE, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak*. A narrative and interpretative review of his life, career and contemporary events. Ahmadabad, Navajivan Publishing House, June, 1958, pp. 550.

T. V. PARVATE, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale*. A narrative and interpretative review of his life, career and contemporary events. Ahmadabad, Navajivan Publishing House, September, 1951, pp. 484.

Gene D. OVERSTREET and Marshall WINDMILLER, *Communism in India*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959, pp. 603.

Myron WEINER, *Party Politics in India*. The development of a Multi-Party system. New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. XIII plus 319.

The achievement of the independence of India in August 1947 was an event of epochal significance. It has meant that about four hundred million human beings have become concerned with finding a worthy place for themselves in the political and economic map of the world. The work of rehabilitation,

solidification, reconstruction and development done in diverse departments of life in the country in the past nineteen years has been an eye-opener both to Indians and outsiders and is slowly revealing the tremendous energy of the Indian population, which had also expressed itself before through the hard and agonizing process of the years of struggle for freedom. India's independence has also had a pronounced intellectual and cultural consequence.¹ It has given a heightened stature to the great prophets, heroes and statesmen of India's struggle for liberation (1857-1947). It has invested the political parties and movements of this country with an Asian and even international significance. India has embarked upon the colossal task of transforming an under-developed agrarian economy and static society to the status of a modern industrialized country within the framework of parliamentary democracy, and this imparts to the political and economic experiments of this country great significance even for outsiders. The number of books on modern India is rapidly increasing. It is satisfying to note that some of these books are bound to have an influence for decades.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) were two of the most eminent and dominating leaders of India in the early two decades of the present century. Both were Chitpavan Brahmins from Maharashtra. Both had received English education, but while the one was a mathematician, the other was an economist. Their political techniques were different. Tilak was an ardent and extreme nationalist and was an exponent of *swaraj* or Home Rule. He has been called "the father of Indian Unrest" (by Valentine Chirol), "the father of Indian Nationalism" (by C. F. Andrews) and "the father of Indian Revolution" (by Jawaharlal Nehru). He was hailed as "the uncrowned king of the Deccan." Gokhale was influenced by Burke's conservatism and historicism and looked forward, like Annie Besant, M. G. Ranade and Pherozshah Mehta, to indissoluble connexions between India and

¹ For a detailed study of political philosophy in modern India see V. P. Varma, *Modern Indian Political Thought and Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya*, published by Laxmi Narayan Agrawal, Hospital Road, Agra and *Political Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, published by Asia Publishing House, Bombay.

Great Britain, based on mutual recognition of dignity and self-respect. While Gandhi had the greatest admiration for the burning selfless patriotism and stupendous sanskrit scholarship of Tilak, he was far more emotionally attached to Gokhale, whom he regarded as his political *Guru* (preceptor).

Several biographies of Bal Gangadhar Tilak were written and published in the fifties of this century to synchronize with the birth centenary of the great leader. T. V. Parvate's book is one of the three volumes which received prizes from the All India Congress Committee. Tilak's life is an epic of sacrifice, uncomplaining suffering and solid work. He was a professor of Mathematics and Sanskrit at the Poona Fergusson College and later spread the feelings of nationalism among the people of Western India through his two famous organs, *Kesari* and *Mabratta*. In 1897 and 1908 he was tried and sentenced for sedition. His six year incarceration in Mandalay (1908-1914) won for him immense prestige and esteem and from 1916 to 1919 he was decidedly the greatest political figure in India. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915) and Gokhale were dead and Gandhi's star was still to ascend. Through his *Home Rule League* (April 1916-1920) Tilak sought to bring lower middle class elements into the Indian National Congress, which so long had been running more or less on Occidental lines. He contributed two books, *Orion* (1893) and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas* (1903) to the field of Vedic antiquities. His ethical philosophy and ontological conclusions are contained in his *Gita-Rahasya*. His two powerful concepts left as legacies to the nation are *swaraj* (Home Rule) and *kar-mayoga* (disinterested action). Parvate has lucidly described the various events in his life, which are linked by their earnestness and sense of urgency to the nationalist leader for *swaraj*. He reproduced an important article of Khadilkar on pages 188-191. But in spite of the productions of D. V. Athalye, Parvate, Karandikar, Pradhan, Tahmankar and Theodore Shey in the field of Tilak studies, the monumental three-volume Marathi biography of Tilak written by N. C. Kelkar still remains the outstanding authority. An English translation of this big biography should be accorded a high priority.

One defect of Parvate's book is that, in the conventional

journalistic style, it fails to give references for the various citations and quotations used in it.

In the chapter "Tilak and Gandhi," the author has indulged in unfounded speculation. He has the boldness to declare: "Their [Tilak's and Gandhi's] moral standpoints were not only not different, but similar, almost the same (p. 530). I will advise him to re-read comparatively Tilak's *Gita-Rahasya* and Gandhi's *Hind-Swaraj* and *Mangal Prabhat*. He may ponder over the classic defence by Tilak of Shivaji's action in killing Afzal Khan (Tilak's speech at the Shivaji festival in 1897) and Tilak's speech at the anniversary of Samarth Ramdas. In the preface (p. viii) Parvate claims to be a dispassionate student of Tilak but it appears he leans rather overmuch to the side of Gandhi.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was a political and moral genius. His life is the moving story of dauntless perseverance. His ceaseless nationalistic efforts, nobility of character and deep moral earnestness raised him from the position of a humble school teacher in Poona New English School to the trusted leadership of the Indian National Congress for a number of years. He did great service to the people of Maharashtra through his professorship at the Fergusson College, Poona, and his activities in the Sarvajanika Sabha and the Deccan Sabha of Poona. He revealed his staggering knowledge of Indian economics and public finance in his evidence before the Welby Commission in London (in 1897, at the age of 33) and in his speeches to the budget sessions of the Imperial Legislative Council. He founded the Servants of India Society in 1905 which included a group of dedicated souls and which once the great Gandhi himself thought of entering. He was the president of the Indian National Congress in the historic session at Varanasi, the Rome of India, in 1905. He took part in bringing about the *Indian Council Act* of 1909, and in 1912, as a recognized imperial statesman, he rushed to the help of his suffering countrymen in South Africa who were struggling for the recognition of their elementary civil rights under Gandhi's leadership. He was a vigorous advocate of free and compulsory elementary education. He exhausted himself in his labours in connexion with the work of the Royal Commission On Public Services. The "Jewel of Maharashtra" met his premature end in February 1915 at the age of forty-

nine. Gokhale was great in his activities and political deeds, but what entitles him to a preeminent political stature and distinguishes his superior statesmanship is that in whatever he did he was always impelled by the loftiest of moral motivations. Never did he fall a victim to diplomatic crookedness of the "political lie." He had a serene temper and a clean record of public service. Justifiably was he called the Indian Gladstone.

T. V. Parvate's biography of Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915) is the first full-length account of the life of that eminent statesman and patriot whom Mahatma Gandhi called his "political *Guru*." It does not have the "personal" touch and moving subjectivism which the accounts of Gokhale by Srinivasa Sastry and R. P. Paranjpay have, but it is fuller. The diverse events and facts in the life-story of the great statesman are revealed here in a lucid, balanced and thorough manner. The author has also consulted some of the latest sources, like the autobiographies of Dr. Rajendra Prasad and M. R. Jaykar, and has incorporated some facts from those books in his. The captions of the various chapters are significant. The thirteenth chapter of this book, entitled "Landmarks of Gokhale's life" (pp. 471-475), will be of help to students of modern Indian history. I congratulate the author on his performance.

Parvate is wrong, however, in saying that the Sarvajanika Sabha in Poona was started by M. G. Ranade (p. 32). On the contrary, it had its inception due to the initiative of Vasudeva Kaka Joshi. Chapter XIII of this book (pp. 225-273) is entitled "Rise of Militant Nationalism" but the word "militant" is not properly chosen. The activities of the terrorists, anarchists and revolutionaries should be termed militant. Parvate's juxtaposition of Moderates and Militants (pp. 386-87) would only introduce confusion. The old words "Moderates" and "Extremists" should be retained because they have acquired an explicit cognitive significance from long usage.

It is true that Tilak and Gokhale were "political" personalities. They were immersed in politics and politics invaded all their relations. Nevertheless they were householders and had a number of blood relations and children. But the domestic and personal sides of their lives remain unrevealed in these two biographies. It is high time that writers should begin researches

in these aspects of the lives of these two leaders; otherwise the persons who are in a position to shed some light on their personal lives and relate some interesting anecdotes may slowly pass out of existence and these aspects would then be consigned to the womb of eternity. Newspaper files and government archives can be examined later, but personal interviews with those men and women who are in a position to tell us something with regard to the personal lives of these leaders cannot be made later. As a matter of fact each year, I should say every month, the ranks of such men and women is depleting. Hence I urge that instead of piling similar types of books containing the same old facts, some newer and hitherto unknown events and anecdotes should be brought to light. It appears that Parvate has hurriedly copied from somewhere the accounts of "the end" of Gokhale. He should have gone into more details. He could have found a model in the excellent volumes entitled *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (2 Vols., by his Eastern and Western Disciples, Advaita Ashrama, Almora).

There are significant differences between the political philosophies of Tilak, Gokhale and Gandhi. Gokhale represents the phase of liberal constitutionalism, social idealism and the quest for the economic amelioration of the conditions of the masses. His intellectual mentors were Burke and Mill in Britain and M. G. Ranade in India. He adhered to the philosophy of "spiritualization of politics." Gokhale's firm attachment to the nobility of means and scrupulous fairness even to the opponent inspired Gandhi. Tilak represents the phase of dynamic nationalism. To a certain extent he wanted a separation of the spheres of politics and ethics. In his personal life he was one of the most scrupulous of persons and was the embodiment of the highest virtues of man which have been exalted in Hinduism, but as a political thinker and as a politician he taught the necessity of occasional violence in a world which was infested by all sorts of evil persons. He drew support for his line of thought from the *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavadgita*, the writings of Samartha Ramdas and the political practice of Shivaji in killing Afzal Khan. Gandhi was a stupendous political personality who in spite of being influenced by Socrates, the Sermon on the Mount, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Edward Carpenter and books on English juris-

prudence and Equity as well as by Raichand Bhai, Tulsidas, the *Bhagavadgita* and Narsi Mehta, was a creative and independent leader. To the analyst of the Indian political scene it appears that, consciously or unconsciously, Gandhi's actions revealed the influence both of Gokhale's extreme solicitude to avoid hurting even his opponents, and Tilak's vital and robust conception of nationalism nurtured by Indian traditions and rooted in the strength and aspirations of the Indian people. But in his practice of the philosophy of *Satyagraha* or non-violent resistance Gandhi achieved more popular success than Gokhale or Tilak. Gokhale's theatre of action was the council room and his technique was to appeal to the feelings and sentiments of rulers like Curzon and Morley. Even when he sanctioned *Swadeshi* he was afraid of boycott, except perhaps in 1905. He could never contemplate breaking the law of the land. Tilak was ready to condone occasional acts of terroristic violence on grounds of expediency. He could even defend them on the metaphysical ground that they were not done for personal selfishness but to enhance the common good of the land and hence were a species of disinterested action, but he could never sanction a deliberate disobedience of or resistance to the law imposed by the foreign bureaucracy. He was a lawyer and he claimed that whatever the law imposed might be he would find out means of agitation which could be defended as legal. But Gandhi would break the law if prompted to do so by his conscience or the "inner voice" which he regarded as the intimation of God. He would plead guilty when brought to the courts of justice and would demand the maximum sentence for himself. In 1897, 1908, 1916 and 1919, Tilak, with the immense mastery of facts and law of a legal scholar, pleaded that he was not guilty to the charges of sedition and some other charges and, in spite of the verdict of the jury, maintained that he was innocent. But during the course of the South African *Satyagraha* (1908-1914), in 1917 in Champaran (North Bihar), and in 1922, Gandhi acceded that he was guilty according to the law of the land. In 1930 he led the historic mass resistance to the iniquitous Salt Laws. Temperamentally Tilak was aggressive and defiant and would sanction violence on grounds of political expediency and ethical altruism, but he never stood for organized disobedience to law. Gandhi,

on the other hand, was meek, humble and simple, but in his action and theory he was the spokesman of dynamic, creative, organized mass resistance to unjust laws.

Communism in India, the joint work by Overstreet and Windmiller, is a voluminous production and embodies the result of immense labour. This book is divided into two parts. The first part begins with the early twenties, with "Indian join the Comintern" (pp. 19-43) and the "Communist Attempts to capture the Nationalist Movement" (pp. 44-58) and discusses the history of the period of the "United Front," "The Imperialist War" and "The People's War." It comes up to the accession to power of the Communists in Kerala—the "Return to Constitutional Communism." (By the way, the phrase "Constitutional Communism" is not well chosen because the ultimate constitution for the Communists is not the national document of fundamental law but the *Capital*. "Parliamentary Communism" would have been a happier phrase.) The second part of the book analyzes the structure and function of the party, its mass organizations, the "fronts" and fellow travelers and the various techniques of agitation and propaganda.

This book presents a study of the Communist Party of India in the framework of two environments—the ideology and activities of the international Communist movement and the political and social dynamics of the Indian situation. The authors regard Soviet leaders and R. Palme Dutt as being "umpires and arbiters who hold the Party together primarily by prestige." (p. 533). The dominating trend of Communist politics has been the harnessing of the Communists' policy in India to the dictation of Joseph Stalin (p. 534). Windmiller and Overstreet themselves, however, become unrealistic when they think that it would have been possible for the Comintern to have formed a firm alliance with Gandhi or Nehru (p. 534). One factor which Overstreet and Windmiller fail to stress is the difference between the ruthlessness, authoritarianism, dogmatic fanaticism and pugnacity inherited by the Russian Communist Party as a legacy from the Russian Czarist techniques and traditions and the over-all tendency in Indian political tradition towards "compromise" which may possibly be affecting even the Indian Communist Party.

The book contains a revealing analysis of the Lenin thesis and Roy thesis (1920) and of the attempt of M.N. Roy to influence the late Deshbandhu C. R. Das in a radical direction.

The book, otherwise big and weighty, lacks theoretical discussions. The student of contemporary Indian political thought cannot help feeling dissatisfied at the inadequacy of its theoretical research. In such a big treatise at least one chapter on the critical assessment of the contributions to theoretical problems of economics, political science and sociology by Indian Communists should have been a necessary feature.

The authors have not discussed the relations between Hindu and Muslim revivalist political thought and Communism. They, however, being foreigners, could not justifiably be expected to be aware of the critique of Marxism by the Arya Samajist leader Narayan Swami, incorporated in a book entitled *Vaidic Samyavada*, and by the Sanatanist leader Karpatri entitled *Marxavada Aur Ramrajya* (published by the Gita Press, Gorakhpur, U. P.). But the authors could at least have referred to Dr. Bhagavan's critique of modern socialism and communism, entitled *Ancient Versus Modern Scientific Socialism*.

One defect of the books both of Weiner and of Overstreet and Windmiller is that neither of them examines the vital problem of the relation of caste to political ideologies and political tactics and political success. Overstreet and Windmiller refer to the success of the Communists in exploiting regional factionalism to challenge the Congress, but the rising monster of "Casteism" remains unanalyzed and unrelated to the issues they are discussing. Gradually the caste in India is raising its politically ugly form and two General Elections, in 1952 and 1957, have revealed its explosive possibilities as a dangerous drug. It will be an instructive study to examine the extent to which caste-mindedness is infecting the so-called leftist parties and groups. Just as in the case of European political parties the role of the economic factor has been analyzed in the case of the leadership, and of the rank and file, so the role of the social and economic factors should be thoroughly investigated for the adequate understanding of Indian political parties.

Some minor inaccuracies, may, however, also be pointed out. The goal of *swaraj* was enunciated at the Calcutta Congress in

1906 and not in 1907 (p. 14). On p. 48, it is written: "in February 1921, Gandhi called off his non-cooperation campaign, because of the violent turn it had taken at Chauri Chaura." It should be 1922 and not 1921. On p. 397, it is inaccurately stated that, at the fifth All India Students Conference on January 1, 1950, Subhas Chandre Bose presided.

The obdurateness of the attitude of the Indian Communist Party on the issue of the Chinese invasion of the Indian frontier reveals the immense gulf that separates the Party from the mass of Indian humanity. For the next decade at least, the Communists cannot hope to get any substantial power in this country, except for obtaining some seats in the legislatures by getting elected through some of the disgruntled urban constituencies.

The book by Myron Weiner contains a good discussion of the factors, both political and psychological, which led to a break between the Indian National Congress and the Congress Socialist Party (pp. 47-64). Nowhere else, perhaps, is such an analytical presentation available. The analysis of the factors responsible for the multiple party system in India (pp. 223-264) is also very good. The author has also attempted a sketchy analysis of the sociology of Bengal leftism. Some of his propositions, such as, "Among the Bengal middle class the rigors of both caste and joint family in large part have broken down" (p. 160), may be challenged, but I must give credit to him for applying the methods of western empirical sociology to the study of some Indian problems and situations. The book contains a fairly good bibliography.

But Myron Weiner's book does not do justice to its title *Party Politics in India*. It almost leaves the foremost Indian political party, the Indian National Congress, out of account, except for a few pages (pp. 280-284). Perhaps the author's justification would be that there are many books dealing with this big organization. So far as the recent history of the other parties is concerned this book contains a number of points. It studies party splits and party mergers. But the fourth chapter of this book, "The Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party Break from Congress" (pp. 65-67), and the tenth chapter, "The Unsuccessful Merger Attempt of Jan Sangha and the Hindu Mahasabha"

(pp. 199-222) could have been shortened and made more pointed. The entire Part II (pp. 25-222) of this book is very diffuse and written in a loose manner. It is full of repetitions and has attached undue importance to "personalities." Quite a good deal of the material incorporated in this book has been derived from the interviews conducted by the author with a number of party leaders in India. The author has entirely missed the Election Commission of India and hence has completely neglected to discuss its significant role in Indian party politics.

A major defect of the book of Weiner is that it lacks a sense of perspective. It is not a systematic contribution to Indian political science. It is highly subjective and often seems to contain the impressions of a tourist who notes down the records of his interviews without having given to the book a theoretical framework. The author could have obtained some valuable tools of research and investigation from the books of Michels, *Political Parties*, Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* and from American books like V. O. Key's *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups* and that of Peter Odegard.

The dominant problem in India is to raise the economic standard of the people within the democratic framework. In Bengal and in some areas of the south like Kerala, authoritarian and totalitarian forces obtained some strength under Communist leadership. Fortunately, the prospects of Communism in India at the present moment are not bright. The Communists played an anti-national role in the 1942 "Quit India" movement. The imperialistic techniques of Mao's China, leading to the rape of Tibet and the occupation of a large part of Indian territory on the northern frontier, have, at least temporarily, brought shame upon the Indian Communists and put upon them the pressure to define their explicit loyalties—to the international Communist fraternity under Moscow-Peking politbureaus or to the soil of sacred Hindustan. Even a sober person like Jawaharlal Nehru has challenged the nationalistic credentials of the Communists. India's political future is safe so long as the various parties are agreed upon the fundamental point of maintaining the democratic pattern. If amidst the ripples and waves, cross-currents and dangerous storms of the Indian political sea they are agreed upon the democratic framework and loyalty to the

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land and the constitution, there is no cause for worry. Weiner has rightly listed three top priorities among the political goals in India—nationalism, secularism and democracy (p. 288) and concludes, “In the final analysis a stable party system, and consequently a stable government, can develop in India only when political polarization is between parties which agree on basic values” (p. 291).

It is high time that the study of the structure of the parties in terms of their social and economic affiliations was attempted. The sociological method which seeks to ascertain the correlation of political ideology and social-economic means would yield fruitful conclusions if applied to the Indian scene.