

Birth of Gopal Krishna Gokhale: This Day in History – May 09

A renowned social reformer of India, Gopal Krishna Gokhale was one of the leaders of the moderate bloc of the Indian National Congress. He was known to be the Mahatma Gandhi's political mentor. His contributions in the early years of the Indian Independence movement is important to be read by the IAS Exam aspirants and questions from this section of GS-I history syllabus have been frequently asked.

Background of Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Gokhale was a social reformer who formed a sectarian organization to work for the relief of the underprivileged in India. He led the moderate nationalists in the early years of the Indian Independence movement.

- Gokhale was born in Kotluk in District Ratnagiri in modern-day Maharashtra to Krishna Rao Gokhale and his wife Valubai.
- Despite having financial problems, his family ensured that he received a western education. This was to have a profound influence on him as came to admire the works of John Stuart Mill and Edmund Burke.
- He first went to school in Kolhapur and then to Bombay for higher education. He secured his graduate degree from Bombay's Elphinstone College in the year 1884.
- He worked in Pune as a school teacher. He later taught political economy and history at Fergusson College, Pune and also became the institution's principal in 1902.



Gopal Krishna Gokhale - Involvement in Political Activities

- In 1889, Gokhale joined the INC motivated by his mentor, social reformer M G Ranade.

- He fought along with a host of other leaders and reformers for more political rights for the Indian people. He was a moderate. He did not believe in radical demands altogether and wished for peaceful and non-confrontationist methods to acquire rights and privileges from the government.
- This is where he came into conflict with the extremist faction of the INC, especially Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- He was elected as Honorary Secretary of the Sarvajanik Sabha, Pune in 1890.
- In 1893, Gokhale became the Secretary of the Bombay Provincial Conference and in 1895, he served as the Joint Secretary of the INC along with Tilak.
- Gokhale believed in working with the colonial government to bring about social reforms in society. He was voted to the Legislative Council of Bombay in 1899, and also to the Governor-General's Imperial Council in 1901.

Revolutionary Changes brought by Gopal Krishna Gokhale

- In 1905, Gokhale established the **Servants of India Society** for expanding education to Indians. He wanted Indians to receive an education that would instil in them a civic and patriotic sense of duty.
- As part of the Society's activities, he arranged mobile libraries and schools. He also gave night classes to industrial workers.
- He was a renowned Economist and his speech on a budget in the Central Legislative Council portrayed his sound and thorough statistical skills.
- Gopal Krishna Gokhale played a major role in the Morley-Minto reforms.
- In 1908, Gokhale founded the 'Ranade Institute of Economics'. He discouraged the untouchability and caste-system, pleaded for the liberation of women and supported the cause of female education.
- Gokhale visited Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa in 1912 on the latter's request. He famously mentored to the father of the nation, who returned to India at Gokhale's request.



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In Gandhi's autobiography, he writes of Gokhale, "*pure as crystal, gentle as a lamb, brave as a lion and chivalrous to a fault and the most perfect man in the political field.*"Gokhale also started newspapers, 'Mahratta' and 'Jnanaprakash'.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale died on 19 February 1915 aged 48.

Also on this day

1540: Birth of the Rajput king of Mewar, Maharana Pratap. **1945:** Germany signed the German Instrument of Surrender ending the Second World War in Europe.

See previous 'This Day in History' here.