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RAJAJI - A UNIQUE PERSONALITY

Dr RAJENDRA PRASAD

SRI RAJAGOPALACHARI, or Rajaji, as he is lovingly called, has been amongst the front-rank politicians of the Gandhian era and on every occasion his contribution has been unique and magnificent. Mahatma Gandhi discovered him and ever since then he has been in the front rank for the last forty years and more. I will illustrate this by referring to particular incidents. He joined the Non-violent Non-cooperation Movement not only with great zeal but with a clear perception of its programme and implications, and soon became one of the finest advocates and interpreters of it. He organized the province of Madras with the help of others, of course, in a way which at once attracted the attention of the people and commanded the respect of other provinces.

After Mahatma Gandhi's incarceration early in 1922 differences arose amongst Congressmen about the programme of the Congress. As will be recollected, the programme comprised boycott of legislative councils, boycott of government-recognized schools and colleges, boycott of law courts and boycott of government honours and titles. Later on encouragement of spinning and weaving and boycott of foreign cloth were added. The differences that arose were with regard to the boycott of legislatures. The group led by the late Desabhandu C. R. Das and Pandit Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel and N. C. Kelkar and others was in favour of entering the legislative councils and practising non-cooperation from within, whereas others, under the leadership of Sri Rajagopalachari, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jinnah and others were in favour of continuing the boycott of legislatures.

The Congress appointed a committee to enquire into and report on whether the country was prepared for undertaking civil disobedience, and after the report of the committee, the movement for lifting the boycott of legislatures gained force and momentum, as civil disobedience was considered

impracticable for the time being. As most of the biggest and most influential leaders were in favour of lifting the boycott of legislatures, the task of defending and maintaining the boycott of legislatures fell on Rajaji who became the leader of the group of "non-changers". His power of acute analysis, trenchant criticism and resourceful argument were seen at their best not only at public meetings which he addressed all over the country but also at the meetings of the All-India Congress Committee and those of other similar organizations.

It was not a little due to his rhetorical gifts that the 'non-changers'—that is, those who opposed any change in the Congress programme—succeeded in gaining the majority of about two-thirds against one-third at the annual session of the Congress at Gaya over which Desabhandu Das presided and which lasted longer and had more speeches from all sides than any other annual session of the Congress, or any other subject in its history. Not only did he address the meetings of the Subjects Committee but he also went round the camps of the delegates from different provinces and addressed them separately before the matter came up for final voting at the Congress session. Some time later he undertook a tour of the country on which it was my privilege to join him and also translate his speeches, which were delivered in English, into Hindi, which, while giving me an opportunity of learning a lot, also saved me the trouble of delivering independent speeches of my own, which I doubt not would have fallen flat after his brilliant performance.

It has been one of the inexplicable circumstances in his life that at times he has practically withdrawn from public controversy and remained aloof until the time when he could come again on the scene and shine at his best. Such a period came after the active controversy regarding entering the councils had subsided. During

that period Mahatma Gandhi concentrated on constructive programme, one main item of which was the revival of spinning and weaving and propagating the Charka. He was appointed chief organizer for his State and he did the work so extremely well that Madras Presidency became one of the best organized provinces for khadi.

It was my good fortune to visit the Ashram which he had established in the interior of Salem district where khadi work was organized on an extensive and intensive scale by friends like Sri K. Santhanam under the guidance and supervision of Rajaji. As is his wont, he himself became a fine spinner and worked out all the details of the khadi programme with his special knowledge and experience, and Madras khadi became well-known all over the country. I remember to have visited Madras State to see its khadi work and was always able to see how well the organization had been built up and how well not only the production part but also the distribution and sales departments were organized.

This went on for some years and then the great movement of civil disobedience came in roundabout 1930. As was to be expected, he was again in the forefront and led the movement and was naturally in jail as so many others were. At the end of this period of active civil disobedience with breaks, the Congress in 1937 decided to accept not only the programme of entering the councils but also of accepting Ministerships if the Government of the time fulfilled certain conditions. Rajaji was one of the first to form the Ministry in his State, where he did excellent work as Prime Minister. In that capacity he enforced some of the programmes which Gandhiji had suggested and which the Congress had accepted such as the promotion of prohibition of intoxicating drugs and liquors, prohibition of untouchability and spread of Hindi, and ruled his province with a clear grain on facts. Ultimately, the Ministry, which he had formed, had to resign like other Congress Ministries on account of the Second World War.

As Prime Minister he did very good work and this used to be regarded as a model to be followed by the Ministries of other States. It showed that he was as successful as an administrator as he had been as a debater, and in this capacity he utilized the talents of all those who had worked with him and under him during the Non-cooperation Movement.

It may be noted that although he has been a leader within the Congress and carried out its programmes with his great ability whenever the call came, he has not always been a silent and passive supporter of these programmes. There have been occasions when he differed, and differed rather acutely, from his colleagues, including even Mahatma Gandhi. But the most wonderful thing about it is that although he differed from Gandhiji occasionally, he retained the deep respect which he had for him and Gandhiji also reciprocated this gesture of Rajaji. On account of his keen intellect he has been admired as much as he has been

feared by his opponents in public controversy, and there have been quite a few such occasions. There were serious differences between him and others, including Gandhiji, in connection with the movement which culminated in the 'Quit India' Resolution of the All-India Congress Committee in August 1942. He was out of that Movement because he did not approve of it. But that did not lessen the respect in which he was held by all including those whom he opposed, and so when power again came into the hands of the Congress in 1947, his services were sought after and obtained in different capacities. He became the Governor of West Bengal, then the last Governor-General; later, a Minister in the Central Government, and ultimately again Chief Minister in his State.

In all these roles, wherever he worked, he always showed remarkable gifts of organization and capacity for administration. After his retirement from the post of Chief Minister he has been leading more or less a private life in

the sense that he is no longer associated with the Congress Party as such, and has been carrying on, on his own, as an independent and free thinker. During his later days he has come to feel that in a democracy a well-organized Opposition is as necessary as the party in power. With that end in view he has founded the Swatantra Party which has a programme of its own, which differs from that of the Congress and can very well form an alternative to the Congress programme if it can gain the support of the people. With the exception of the Communist Party no other party has got such a clear-cut and well-defined programme differing from that of the Congress as the Swatantra Party has. But it is a remarkable thing that he has remained only a founder of the party and has put others in charge of its detailed working as president and secretary, or as members of the legislatures when the elections have come.

It is not for me to discuss in detail his programme and point out wherein it differs from the Congress programme or that of other parties. It is enough to say that it has its distinctness and has its able advocates. Although the Swatantra Party was formed but just a little over two years before the last general elections, it put up candidates in the different States and in one or two of them it gained a pretty large number of adherents and in one State at least it formed the main Opposition to the Congress Party.

Only a short time ago the Gandhi Peace Foundation organized a Convention to protest against nuclear tests and a deputation with Rajaji as one of its members was sent to Western countries like America and England. It is no exaggeration to say that Rajaji created a great impression wherever he went and his arguments were appreciated wherever he spoke and discussed the subject.

In his later years he has been writing especially in SWARAJYA from week to week applying his trenchant criticism to the present

AMONG THE UNBENDING GREAT

There are some whose very existence is a source of liberal education to all who come in contact with them. Rajaji is of this class. He spread enlightenment as if it were a second nature. This is done not with exhortations ostentatiously, but quietly with the very minimum of words. Rajaji has spoken and written quite as much as any leader or writer in any part of the world. But never has he wasted a single word in purposeless repetition and meaningless redundancy. In this, as in other matters, he is our great exemplar of economy.

Rajaji's reputation for acute intelligence has not served him well in politics. More meanings are sometimes attributed to what he says than he himself is aware of. The relentless resentment of mediocrity pursues him with an inquisitorial search for double meanings. In reality, however, his honesty is implacable. It is a different sort of honesty from the one

that seeks publicity for its manifestations. It is exacting and not exciting.

Rajaji is no stickler for change for its own sake. He has no fascination for speed of movement. He is out of sympathy with many of the enthusiasts of our sloganized democracy. And because of this he seems often to be an isolated figure unacceptable to the multitude. Even so was Socrates. All through history, the unbending great, inflexible in honesty of purpose, have won their way to the homage of posterity only through contemporary misunderstanding in their own time. It is so with Rajaji also. All his insights, matured by sorrow and disappointments, have filled him finally with an indefatigable compassion. There is no defeat for such a one, whose very presence is like a benediction on his fellow-men.

—KHASHA SUBBA RAU in SWARAJYA

Government policy, programme and action, and there is no doubt that his writings have contributed very largely not only to the formation of the Swatantra Party with its own distinct policy and programme, but also to the creation of a general interest even amongst those who do not belong to that party in its policy and programme. His articles are read by a very wide circle as these are reproduced in other papers also, and there is no doubt that even where people disagree with his views they read his articles with respect. For a man of his age, to undertake not only writing day after day and week after week for papers on current and even abstruse subjects, but to go on deputation to different countries is a feat of endurance and hard work which might well be envied by many of very much younger age. And for all his age there is no weakening noticeable in his writings as he was, say, in 1922—forty years ago. Only the subject has changed, the point of view has changed, the persons concerned are changed, but his logic and analysis and his opinions are as pointed and searching as they ever have been.

Rajaji has not been a mere political agitator. As I have said, he has made positive contributions in various administrative capacities and has left his mark on the subjects he has dealt with. He has also been an active social reformer in his own person and has given a direct blow to the system of caste, although originally he belonged to one of the most orthodox groups among Brahmins. He has not been blessed with robust health and I know how grievously he suffered from asthma in those early years (1922 and after) when I had just begun to get the preliminary experience of this fell disease. But the most remarkable thing is not the fact that he has worked hard in spite of it, but that he has also succeeded in curing himself of it, not so much by medication as by regulating his life, his food and his habits. I sometimes wonder if I should be envying him for his great mental gifts, or for the strength of his will which he has

shown not only in matters of public importance but also in his personal and domestic life. He has, however, not been happy in his domestic life, having a widowed daughter and a widowed daughter-in-law to be looked after. But he has never allowed any of these depressing things to influence him in public affairs and has carried on like one who has no private cares.

No appreciation of Rajaji can be complete without a reference to the devotion with which he has made available to the readers, both of Tamil and English, the

gems of the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. On the whole, if I were asked to say in one word what he is, I should say: he is unique, unique where he agrees with one, unique where he disagrees with one, unique in his thought and unique in his action. It has been my privilege to have not only gained his affection and goodwill but also to have retained these all these forty years and more without a single break or a single moment of flurry, in spite of differences in points of view.

December 8, 1962 SWARAJYA

A MAN OF PEACE AND HARMONY

J. L. DAS

LEGENDS, "Rajajiana", as a scribe has termed them, concerning Sri Chakravarti Rajagopalachari are numerous. So far as I know, Rajaji, made his debut on the literary stage when the responsibility of editing Mahatma Gandhi's *Young India* fell on him with Gandhiji's imprisonment following the Non-cooperation Movement. Since then, for over 50 years, articles, short stories, letters to newspapers, and occasionally even verses, flowed from his facile pen. He used the "Dear Reader" column of the *SWARAJYA* "to express his incisive views with inimitable lucidity on a wide-ranging spectrum of national and international affairs".

Rajaji wrote both in Tamil and in English fluently and beautifully. He was the author of about 15 volumes including "Socrates", "Marcus Aurelius", "The Mahabharata", "The Ramayana", "The Upanishads", "Hinduism: a Doctrine and a Way of Life". His commentaries on the "Bhagavat Gita" are regarded as outstanding on the subject. Rajaji was a voracious reader and he used to read just about everything that came his way. Though he was a prolific writer he never wrote anything casually. All his compositions, from serious political and religious dissertations to short stories, articles and books for children, and even satirical poems reveal the depth of his wide-ranging know-

ledge, clarity of thought and lucidity of expression.

If, as some critics aver, the mission of litterateurs is not only to regale the readers but also to educate them on different human problems, then it must be said that Rajaji played his part admirably well. For years his prolific and lucid religious writings in Tamil in *Kalki* gave ennobling delight to a very wide circle of men and women. His versions of the two classics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, according to him, "are the best service I have rendered to my people", as he feels that "it is the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* that bind our vast numbers together as one people, despite caste, space and language that seemingly divide them".

With Rajaji universal peace and harmony was an abiding passion. He led a delegation of the Gandhi Peace Foundation to Britain and the US, when he was more than 80 years old, to try and persuade the leaders of those countries to give up testing and stockpiling of nuclear weapons. On his return journey he had a long interview with Pope Paul at the Vatican.

This extraordinary person, whose intellectual agility and alertness, advancing years could not blunt, left us at the ripe old age of 94. As someone summed up, quoting a Sanskrit couplet, the like of him "never was and never again will be".

PUNJAB AND HARYANA LETTER:**PUNJAB AND HARYANA OPPOSED TO FOOD RATIONING**

CHANDIGARH, February 18: In pursuance of the 12-point programme adopted at the conference of presidents and secretaries of District Congress Committees held in New Delhi on February 2, the ruling party in both Punjab and Haryana has started taking steps to establish a rapport with the masses. Mrs Indira Gandhi, Mr D. P. Dhar and Dr S. D. Sharma exhorted Congressmen to involve themselves effectively in the implementation of Government policies and in particular, the Plan schemes. On February 14, addressing the presidents and general secretaries of the District Congress Committees in Punjab, the Chief Minister, Mr Zail Singh, called upon them to activate the rank and file and ensure people's cooperation in the implementation of the Congress Government's socialistic policies. At the meeting—the first of its kind held since the 1972 Assembly elections—Congressmen were also urged to seek mass support in the formulation of the Fifth Plan.

Accordingly, training camps, "national weeks" and district-level conferences have been planned in Punjab. Top-level Haryana Congress leaders have also resolved to activate the party units throughout the State in order to involve the people in the solution of major economic problems. It has been decided to build a party cadre immediately. About 1,000 volunteers are proposed to be enrolled, in the first instance, in the State's (Haryana) ten districts. They will be given necessary training in various fields. The Chief Minister, Mr Bansi Lal, himself launched the mass contact programme in January. What is even more significant, Congressmen are being urged to help in controlling the prices of essential commodities.

Most Congressmen blame the existing bureaucratic set-up and the inefficient administration for the present malaise; they contend that so long as the existing set-up is not reformed, they would not be able to achieve big results. Such

appeals as they make at rural gatherings are unlikely to elicit a healthy response. Opposition groups, especially communists, are also planning similar activity to reach the masses. Reports from the border areas already speak of extremists' renewed activity among the rural sections.

Both Punjab and Haryana governments have adopted a common line in regard to the grain trade. They now favour a State take-over of the wholesale trade but are opposed to it at the retailers' level. Retailers and consumers, they feel, should be free to buy their wheat requirements in the open market. Such a policy would permit lakhs of retailers to continue their vocations and also save the consumers from hardships. Since these two States have a sizable surplus of wheat and rice every year, rationing is regarded as totally unnecessary. So the Chief Ministers have decided to oppose any Central

GUJARAT LETTER:**STATE TAKE-OVER OF WHOLESALE GRAIN TRADE**

RAJKOT, February 15: As if the mishandling of the drought situation is not enough, the Gujarat Government has announced its decision to take over the wholesale trade of wheat and rice. At present, it is unable to supply sufficient stocks to its fair-price shops. The first reaction to this 'take-over' announcement is a sudden spurt in the prices of wheat and rice. The State Government is creating circumstances wherein full rationing will become inevitable, bringing further corruption and misery in its wake. The measure could have been postponed till after the monsoon and attention been paid towards gaining cooperation from the various social institutions and political parties, taking the people into confidence about the real state of affairs. Instead, the State Government puts forth false reports and un-

move to introduce rationing which, it is feared, would cause an "unnecessary scare".

As for the elimination of middlemen, both States feel that only the "pucca" middlemen should be eliminated. Most of them are already out of the business. But the "katcha" commission agents should be allowed to remain because it is beyond the Government's capacity to establish a large network to manage the trade at all levels. Each State has demanded substantial sums of money (ranging between one crore of rupees and two crores of rupees) for the implementation of the wheat trade take-over. The Punjab Food Minister contends that the "katcha" middlemen will help impart efficiency to the procurement system, since they are of considerable assistance to the farmer in disposing of grain. Wholesale dealers in Punjab have already been directed to clear their surplus stocks in readiness for the implementation of the new policy. The permissible quantity of stock is now 50 tonnes (500 bags) of wheat. There are at present over 10,000 licensed wholesale wheat dealers.

reliable statistics about the food situation. The tendency of the State Government to make famine administration an one-party show robs it of cooperation from the mandals, social institutions, mahajans and the Opposition.

Gujarat is disappointed at the recent indication given by the Union Irrigation Minister, Dr K. L. Rao, of further postponement of the Narmada award by the Prime Minister. He said that it was now slated for the end of the Lok Sabha budget session. This delay is all the more regrettable considering the colossal annual loss of 15 billion rupees suffered by the nation. This dispute is hanging fire for the last ten years. Under the terms of the agreement even the height of the Navagam dam is to be decided by the Prime Minister.