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RAJAJI: MORAL SENTINEL OF INDIA

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CHAKRAVARTI RAJAGOPALACHARI was a unique personality. It would be no exaggeration to say that he was the Mount Everest among statesmen, of not only India, but of the world. He took full share in the public affairs of India and beyond. In the midst of rough and tumble, he maintained his serene poise based on his profound philosophy and deep faith in religion and *dharma*. To adapt Oliver Goldsmith's lines, Rajaji was like—

“The tall cliff that lifts its
lonely form,
Swells from the vale and
midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the
rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles
on its head.”

Rajaji was greater than greatness, wiser than wisdom, more compassionate than compassion as they are generally understood. No tribute, however high, can do justice to him. The range of his interests and services was not limited to India but encompassed the whole world. One of his major services was his persistent and passionate plea for disarmament and, more particularly, for a ban on nuclear weapons. The devastation caused by the atom bombs in Japan distressed him so deeply that he kept his campaign against such weapons and undertook, when he was 80, his first overseas travel.

Mahatma Gandhi claimed Rajaji as his conscience-keeper. Indeed, Rajaji was more than that; he was the conscience-keeper of India as well: the moral sentinel; the Bhishma of modern India. He dwelt on many subjects, social, religious, educational and political, and each of them he invested with his philosophical idealism, as well as his practical realism. He once described the qualities that contributed to greatness in a man—a man's brain, a woman's heart and a child's innocence. Deeply involved as he often was in political differences, he never allowed them to embitter human relation-

ships and friendships. He had the courage to differ publicly even from Mahatma Gandhi on more than one occasion, but his devotion to the person of the Mahatma suffered no diminution. He was endowed with penetrating intellect, white-heat idealism and snow-white purity of personal life. He never sought cheap popularity or pander to widespread superstitions to gain a following or votes from the masses; his appeal was mostly to the intelligentsia, though they were always in a minority. Rajaji never fought shy of being alone in his opinions. He had wisdom without vanity, and authority without office. He was an intellectual and a moral colossus, a combination of Bhishma and Drona, of Yudhishtira and Arjuna.

Rajaji had the courage to part company with the Congress, which he had served with consummate devotion and skill, when he disapproved of its policies and to start the Swatantra Party when he was 80 years of age! He felt that it was not an adventure, but a paramount duty for him to oppose the Congress policies which, in his opinion, were not in the best interests of the Indian people. He was a confirmed democrat and an opponent of communism on ideological grounds.

An instance of his nobility of character was his refusal to contest the Presidentship of the Indian Republic against Babu Rajendra Prasad with whom he had worked in the Congress for decades and suffering with him for India's Swaraj.

Rajaji advocated unilateral action to end even international disputes. He asked America to disarm unilaterally. He took a similar view in the dispute between India and Pakistan.

Commenting on Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom, he said: “Let us clearly and once for all realize that ill-will cannot be overcome except in the way our beloved leader taught. There is much war-like talk about peace and much belligerent demand for goodwill. But fire cannot be quenched by

pouring oil on it. Do not demand love . . . Begin to love and you will be loved . . . This is the law, and no statute or logic can alter it.”

This sentiment of Gandhiji and Rajaji reminds one of the precept of Jesus Christ.

Rajaji's activities were not confined to politics, though, in their very nature, they loomed larger than his other activities. He was a great literary artist and the author of several prestigious books. He rendered into English the Hindu classics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and many Sanskrit hymns. He was engaged in revising the *Ramakrishna Upanishad*, being the life and philosophy of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the guru of Swami Vivekananda.

If Rajaji's services in the political and literary fields were great, his services in the field of social reform were no less significant. He was among the first to fight untouchability. He seconded Mahatma Gandhi's campaign for the removal of untouchability among Hindus. He introduced Prohibition to save the poor and the Harijans from the evils of drink and introduced the Sales Tax to make up for the loss of revenue. Almost till his last breath he preached and propagated Prohibition and deplored that even the Congress Governments denigrated it.

On December 8, 1972, Rajaji completed ninety-four. In the December 9 issue of *SWARAJYA*, appeared his last advice to India and Pakistan. Therein he said:

“My call to all people is that there should be what is called a summit meeting as soon as possible. Economic and political ruin threaten both India and Pakistan unless the Simla accord is taken to fulfilment. I hope that danger is recognized and everything is done to take the Simla accord to its true fulfilment.”

Rajaji was a *mahatma*. His physical body has disappeared, but his memory will live for ever. Let us pay our reverential homage to this saint, scholar and super-statesman, and cherish the enduring memory of this Dharmaraja.

—Courtesy: All India Radio

A CAMPAIGNER FOR JUST CAUSES

V. K. N. CHARI

IN 1956, a few friends and I met Rajaji. We expressed that though what he was saying was quite right, even his closest political associates were not heeding his advice on many matters. His reply was, 'without caring for results I must speak out the truth whether or not they follow'. That was the courage of his conviction and confidence in his mission as many Acharyas like Sri Ramanuja and Sri Sankara held.

It was in July 1956. I had the privilege of enjoying the inestimable friendship of the late Sri Khasa Subba Rau. Soon after he had relinquished his association with SWATANTRA, he planned to start SWARAJYA. I had a small part to play in its beginning. While we were discussing the names of those from whom messages and articles could be obtained for the journal, I mentioned Rajaji's name. Sri Subba Rau was sceptical but he was persuaded to ask Rajaji and he did—still maintaining that his criticism of Rajaji many a time in SWATANTARA might have irritated him and that he had no hope of Rajaji responding to his request.

Imagine a few days later 'Khasa' came hurrying up to my house and with tearful eyes showed the first message from Rajaji. He was so much overwhelmed by the affection and regard shown by Rajaji in responding to his request that he himself read the message twice over with eyes filled with tears.

In his message dated July 14, 1956, Rajaji said:

"For years past Khasa Subba Rau has been no political or journalistic friend of mine except occasionally when it pleased him! But I believe his talent for criticism is a public asset. I am glad to give his weekly the blessing he asks me for; and I give it with all my heart, for I know the great value of frank and quick criticism for which he has great aptitude. He has more than thirty years of journalistic experience and has now reached ripeness of know-

ledge and an understanding of true values."

That was 'Khasa' and that was Rajaji—two honest intellectuals who had no acrimony at personal levels.

It was in 1948-49 and Rajaji was entering his 71st birthday. A committee was formed to celebrate his birthday and I had the privilege of being the Secretary along with the late Sri 'Kalki' Krishnamurthy. The late Mr Omandur Ramasami Reddiar, who was then the Chief Minister, was asked to head the committee. A meeting was organized by the committee at the present Rajaji Hall, then called the Banqueting Hall to celebrate the occasion. Mr N. S. Varadachari hit upon the bright idea of requesting the Government to name that Hall after Rajaji. The then Minister for Public Works Department, Mr M. Bakthavatsalam, who was present, accepted the suggestion and from then on the Banqueting Hall came to be known as Rajaji Hall.

I had the unique good fortune of knowing Rajaji since 1926. I have ever since continued to revere him as "the patriarch of my dreams". Right from his jail diary to his "heart pourings" in SWARAJYA to "his Dear Readers" I have never failed to read what he wrote and in them I read the words of Gandhiji and hear the voice of Gandhiji in its true tones. No other politician or leader had been so straight as a stick in public life and merited universal admiration as Rajaji. It will be true to say that the voice of Gandhiji was the voice of God and it is equally true to say that the voice of Rajaji was the voice of Gandhiji.

Rajaji was a true campaigner for just and right causes. He was the first to campaign for Prohibition in our country. I have heard it said that when he was Chairman of the Salem Municipality he had to wage a bitter fight with the State Administration (the British Government) not to locate drink shops within the Municipal limits and succeeded in it. The first

PROHIBITION

It is a laudable gesture on the part of the Tamil Nad Chief Minister to propose to raise a memorial for Rajaji, near the Gandhi Mandapam in Madras. It will be a more fitting homage and memorial to the great leader, if Mr Karunanidhi makes a more noble gesture by re-introducing Prohibition which was nearest to Rajaji's heart. It is well-known that Rajaji was heart-broken when Prohibition was withdrawn by the DMK Government.

New Delhi

R. PARTHASARATHI

reform he undertook in 1937 as soon as he took over the Ministry was to introduce Prohibition. And today after 30 years to see it scrapped or suspended, one can imagine his agony.

In his campaign against BCG, smoking, nuclear weapons and family planning everyone knew what he said was right but none had the courage to say so. I still feel that what he said in 1942 was the voice of caution. But none heard it. The present chaos in public life, where there is scant regard for any legal and moral values is a direct sequel to what had happened then. He foresaw the changes and warned us rightly then.

Recently he said that he was a practising and a practical socialist. One who knew him, knows that it was true. But few took the trouble to know him. In their fear of his intellect or suspicion of his quick logic they distrusted him. He was the most misunderstood person in our public life. The Pannayal Ordinance, the Debt Relief Act, the Temple Entry Act were all evidences of his close identification with the poor.

For sheer integrity, character, fearlessness, mature wisdom, clean private and public life, scrupulous adherence to accountability of public funds, even his political enemies should have to give him the first place. Ever in the forefront of our freedom struggle his sacrifices were immeasurable. He was battle-scarred, having had to fight many a battle, alone sometimes, in his adherence to right. It will be appropriate to call him a "Grand Rebel" in our Indian political history after the Great Shivaji.