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WITH MAHATMA AND RAJAJI IN CALCUTTA

by P. S. MATHUR

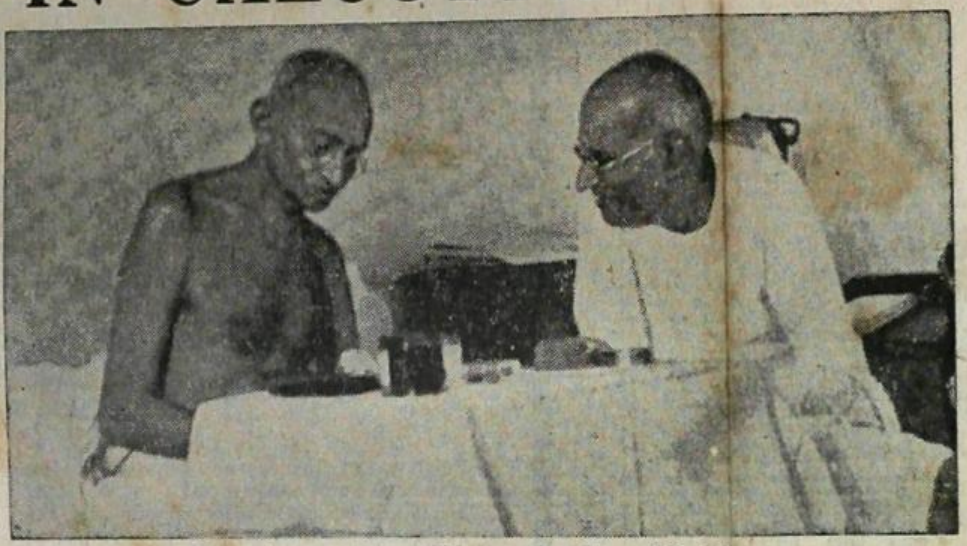
"WE have given to West Bengal as Governor one of our foremost leaders, whose abilities, administrative experience and statesmanship have been proved in various fields of activity." This is how Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel supported the appointment of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari as the first Governor of the newly carved-out province — not States till then — of West Bengal. Yet, Rajaji's coming to Calcutta did not please a small section, reportedly led by Sarat Chandra Bose, which went to welcome him at the Dum Dum airport with black flags and some placards. It was the afternoon of August 14, 1947. A few foreign correspondents who had gathered in Calcutta anticipating "some fireworks" did take notice of this demonstration and traced back its link with the Tripuri Congress.

A few hours before being sworn-in, at the stroke of midnight August 14-15, Rajaji had already witnessed the miracle of 'Hindu-Muslim Ek-ho', brought about by Gandhiji, who had been persuaded to defer for some time his second visit to Noakhali. As the sun was getting for the last day on this vast and vital region of the British Empire, people swarmed the streets of Calcutta, shouting slogans and moving about different areas in trucks, cars and all manners of vehicles with flags and fastoons.

Gates Thrown Open

Rajaji described this pleasant experience to the Calcutta Rotarians in his characteristic style: "When I came here," he said, "I was full of anxiety as to how Calcutta will behave on the great day of Independence. I saw a miracle. God brought His children together in a manner I had not the courage to hope for. If I were not the Governor of the Province I would have jumped upon one such lorry or sat down on the streets and shouted slogans with them. It was a miracle. No body organised it. It takes a long time to organise a massacre or a murder. But good things happen in this world without any trouble, without any organisation. Men and women are born naturally good. The shortest distance between two points, the mathematicians say, is a straight line. The swiftest approach between two men is love and affection. Of course, the magician was here."

On the morning of August 15, large crowds, many among them having been out the whole night touring round the streets shouting slogans, swarmed round Government House demanding access into the place forbidden to them since its construction in 1803. The gates had to be thrown open and soon men, women and children were everywhere, some having brought their food packets with them for a grand picnic on the spacious lawns, with the hawkers quickly supplementing their supply of snacks. Some got themselves photographed sitting on Tipu Sultan's throne while some others occupied every available durbar chair and children climbed over the old guns and cannons decoratively scattered about in then beautifully maintained garden. Even there were people splashing in the Governor's swimming pool. It was a gala day, and the first expression of independence was to be free to do-what-you-like. There were some pilferers and some vandals who caused minor damage to a few old paintings and valuable fittings.



Discussing a point — Mahatma Gandhi and Rajaji.

Police Story

Not surprising on such occasions someone went and told the Premier on his first day in office that B.B.C. had broadcast that an angry crowd had entered Government House and hackled Rajagopalachari. Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh dutifully reported this to Gandhiji, who contradicted this report at his post-prayer meeting the same evening. But what annoyed Rajaji more was not the news bulletin but the day's police resume of "incidents," which smacked of the Raj tone. Rajaji himself scribbled in pencil a sort of rejoinder. This was sent to me. I was told this was his very first memo and I have preserved it as a precious memento. It read:

His Excellency's Office Slip

I do not like the Police story of yesterday's happenings. The position should be properly explained. The story as it was broadcasted (sic) yesterday gives the impression that a hostile crowd came in for violent demonstrations. But the fact was that in the vast crowds there was not one unfriendly voice raised. The pilferers and their thefts along with vandalism to deflect attention must have been the work of a dozen or more men who took advantage of the situation. The most remarkable thing was that though thousands went past me and I was completely at the disposal of the thronging all over the place there was not a single hostile person I met.

Sd. C. R.

Since AIR Monitoring Station in Simla was able to assure me that B.B.C. had made no such uncomplimentary reference, there was nothing which I could contradict. A Police Officer (however, had to go to Government House to explain how Lalbazar issued an incorrect and wrongly-worded report.

Arms Surrender

But the "Calcutta bubble", an expression which Gandhiji himself gave us, soon burst, and on September 1, there were some quite serious communal clashes in a restricted part of the City. Gandhiji was very much pained and went on fast "to end it if and when sanity returns to Calcutta." Rajaji warned the people, and also appealed to them. "The hours are steadily and not too slowly wearing Gandhiji away. Danger is much nearer than during his previous fasts. May I hope Calcutta will produce a clean bill of health? We can throw the blame on no outsider if this precious life ebbs away in Calcutta. It will be a shame and a tragedy too awful for words."

Gandhiji on his arrival in Calcutta, enroute Noakhali, had warned Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and his shadow cabinet. "The hour of test has arrived. You will have to show in full measure your non-violent courage to the world. I will not be a living witness of India's revision to slavery, which will be her lot if the Hindu-Muslim quarrel continues, but my spirit will weep over the tragedy even from beyond the grave. My prayer is that God may spare that tragedy." Gandhiji had been persuaded to extend his stay in Calcutta and he had written to the out-going Governor Burrows, "Man is veritably clay in the hands of the Great Potter. So I am here."

On September 4, Gandhiji's health was at a low ebb and there was some genuine anxiety. Peace Squads were going round the affected areas and till early afternoon no incidents had been reported. After a brief visit to Beliaghata at about 11 a. m., Rajaji had it conveyed to me that Gandhiji was being persuaded to end his fast.

At 4.30 p. m. I was sent for and given a lecture on the philosophy of fasting as a spiritual weapon by Rajaji. It cuts deep but painlessly. It touched the soul and brought the body and the mind together. Gandhiji's 'technique' is no doubt the presentation of Love and Truth in any confrontation with Evil and Falsehood." In the present instance, Rajaji explained, "Gandhiji might stretch the patience of the people until the last minute, but he might spare the nation one more night of anxiety and agony." It meant, and we worked out the schedule then and there, that Gandhiji could be expected to end the fast only a few minutes before the AIR transmission for the day closed down. I, therefore, arranged a 'hot line' with the News Room in AIR, New Delhi, for a special announcement interrupting the programme whenever necessary.

Gandhiji's mind and the prevailing conditions had been so correctly judged by Rajaji that we all felt amazed. At 9.15 Gandhiji broke his fast, at 9.18 I told AIR and within minutes the world was relieved of a great anxiety. Throughout the evening leaders were coming in and going out of the Beliaghata camp and there was a demonstration of mass surrender of arms and weapons. A joint undertaking was given by several leaders. Gandhiji took

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no notice of the arms surrender nor very much of the undertaking given by the leaders but agreed to end the fast for he reposed in them "the confidence that they would prove as good as their words."

What Rajaji told in a press statement that might would hold good for any people, any time, anywhere:

> "Our common enemy and our common shame is the mischief maker who neither of us wants to protect or encourage. Follow Gandhiji's advice and you will see good fruit atonce, as you did when Heaven's windows opened on the 15th of August. The fastoons hanging still in the deserted streets and fluttering in the wind call you back to mutual love and trust."

West Bengal and India were able to avert the tragedy too awful for words that day, but on January 30, 1948, as Rajaji again put it we were "robbed of our greatest possession by a senseless lunatic" and appealed to the people "to pray for physical, moral and spiritual strength to bear the loss", with his just seven-days-in-office Premier, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy adding the hope that "Gandhiji's deathless soul will continue to operate through us and amongst us."

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Rajaji wanted a portion of Gandhiji's ashes to be immersed into the Ganga near Dakshineswar, an area too small to hold the vast crowds expected to be present to pay their last homage to the Father of the Nation. It was with some difficulty and after a lot of patient persuation that he agreed to change the venue I had selected in the Lat Bagan at Barrackpore, now Gandhi Ghat. The **memorial mandapam** put up there was Rajaji's suggestion, but then he wanted us to avoid the danger of the place becoming a temple or a shirne, or ever a formal memorial. He said at the ceremony to lay the foundation:

> Let us avoid as dangerous the tendency to make a great philosopher of Gandhiji, he did not at any time desire to be one. He was a man of action. Let us not make any new complicated doctrine out of his teachings or any rival scholastic philosophy and seek to build peculiar modes of life adding one more denomination to the many already prevailing in India."

Yet, Rajaji an ardent adherent to Gandhiji's teachings would have resented being described as a staunch "Gandhite." He did not like that description. He tried to defend Truth and Non-violence to such an extent that he even had to differ many a time with his Congress and other colleagues. His total refusal to endorse violence in any form — through thought or action — he demonstrated when I approached him on behalf of some leaders of the local Congress to agree to perform the **mahurat** of Lok Nath Bal's projected film on the Chittagong Armoury Raid. "Since when has the Congress decided to condone violence?" was his first reaction.

I pleaded that this was the view of the Congress after the decision to defend the INA personnel at the Red Fort trial, and that I had been told by leaders like Surendra Mohan Ghosh, Kiran Shankar Roy and Bhupati Mazumdar that henceforth terrorist martyrs would be treated at par with those who died in a non-violent struggle. "Are they Congressmen?" he asked. "But I still give you a simple test. Gandhiji is not there or else we would have asked him. You write to V. Shankar and M. O. Mathai and enquire from Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru if Rajaji should accept this invitation and tell them also that personally I am not inclined to be associated with this."

"I acted accordingly and prompt came the replies by the same mail and in almost identical language. While Mathai said that Jawaharlal Nehru thought that it was not necessary for the Provincial Governor to seek his advice in such matters, in this case C. R. should politely decline to accept the request. Sadar Patel's advice was forthright and precise. He made it clear that it would be against the accepted policy of Government and the Congress both. While in Bengal certain amount of local sentiment was involved, it was again in Bengal that there was need to curb all enthusiasm for eulogising those who indulged in violence against authority or as a means of attaining any objective. I took both the letters to the Governor. "Did I not tell you so? You can now tell your friends to leave me out of it."

Then I heard from him another very memorable sermon on non-violence. Rajaji told that this was not a 'technique' or a 'gadget.' That the very notion that what Gandhiji taught was one such, unfortunately, had led to error and disappointment. "But still love and truth are not the commodities one could purchase in the market. They cannot procure them like guns or rifles or pistols. Love and truth can issue only out of faith in God. The moral energy—soul force as Gandhiji would put it—came from that faith. Application of these elements of energy was like possessing a beautiful and trusted fountain pen. But if there was no ink in it, or if it was filled with just plain water, it would not write. It would be of no use. One had to fill himself in a like manner with faith. Gandhiji gave us no new technique or weapon to displace an old troublesome way but he only revived an old spiritual teaching and faith in truth and love. He was not it's inventor. He was just a man of God."

This was Rajagopalachari who was always accurate in anticipation, critical in appreciation and faithful in application of Gandhiji's philosophy of truth and love. This was C. R. I had the privilege to work with when he was the Governor of West Bengal.

Close Liaison

The Organisation, which is unde the Director General of Researcl & Development, follows a two-tie organisational structure, a HQ se up responsible for policy direction control and coordination and th R & D Establishments or Labora tories, each responsible for deve lopment of an assigned range o defence equipment or an assigne area of scientific research. Apar from the normal channels of guid ance and direction catered for in the organisational structure, there exist the R & D Council and va rious panels composed of repre sentatives of different agencies eminent scientists and experts ir the country for a proper orienta tion of the Defence R & D effort.

The Defence R & D Counci functioning under the Chairman ship of Raksha Mantri is at th apex and is responsible for layin down the broad policies for effec tive direction of the research ef fort. There are also in existence 1 different R & D Panels to cove different fields of activity. Thes panels are chaired by senior offic ers from the Services and are res ponsible for laying down the tasks their target dates for completior and to review the progress on in dividual projects to resolve bottle necks. In addition, within the R & D HQ there is a network of technical committees which go into the day to day problems of the organisation.

A close liaison is maintained b the Defence R & D Organisa with other scientific organisr