

Indian Nation. Paper

21 JAN 1973

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RAJAJI: SOME REMINISCENCES

I knew Rajaji for the last fifty two years from the time he came in contact with Gandhiji and joined the Satyagraha movement. He had just shifted from his native town of Salem and established himself as an advocate in the Madras High Court. He was a rising lawyer, who, if he had continued in the profession, would have been a great advocate and a jurist. But the loss to the legal profession was an invaluable gain to the nation.

We were afterwards colleagues in the Working Committee for years. Whenever the Committee met in Allahabad, though the arrangements were made for the stay of Rajaji and Vallabhbhai at Anand Bhawan, they preferred to stay with me in Swaraj Bhawan. These two great men had a high opinion of Sucheta's abilities.

Rajaji before he took part in the Satyagraha movement was in politics a follower of Tilak. He was an extremist, the ultra-radical of these days. But his main activity then was in the social field. Though born in an orthodox Brahmin family, he did not believe in untouchability or the Caste System. He also did not observe the rites and ceremonies of the Hindu religion.

Fine Debator

The first mark he made as a fine debator was at Congress Session in Gaya in 1922 presided over by Chitranjan Das. The old leadership, Das, Motilal, Vithalbhai stood for change in the Congress programme laid down by Gandhiji, in favour of council-entry as against Sardar, Rajendra Babu and myself who stood for no change. Jawaharlal had not made up his mind yet. Our spokesman at Gaya was Rajaji. We carried the day. Chitranjan Das was constrained to resign as the President of the Congress.

After his first brilliant performance, there have been ups and downs in the political life of Rajaji. When in 1924 Gandhiji was released from jail on account of his illness, he put an end to the controversy between the pro-changes and the no-changes. Rajaji then took to constructive work and organised Khadi and village work and lived in an Ashram.

Set Back

Rajaji's first set back in the Congress, was when he said that the Congress must recognise Pakistan in principle. This was greatly misunderstood at the time. What Rajaji meant came out clearly, when in 1943, after he was released, Gandhiji met Jinnah at the instance of Rajaji. At the very first meeting when Gandhiji mentioned Rajaji's name, Jinnah denounced him in such terms that, as Gandhiji said afterwards, he felt like abandoning the talks with Jinnah. Jinnah understood the meaning of Rajaji, about the acceptance of Pakistan in theory by the Congress, better than his critics in the Congress. His idea was as proposed by Gandhiji, which was rejected by Jinnah.

The second occasion when he differed from his colleagues of the Congress was at the time of the 'quit India' movement. He stood for co-operation with the foreign Government to defeat Hitler's Germany.

But the differences he had with Gandhiji and his colleagues of the Working Commit-

tee did not make any change in the high opinion about Rajaji's great qualities, of the head and the heart. Gandhiji once called him his 'Conscience keeper'. It was, therefore, not surprising that as soon as India's freedom was in the offing, Rajaji was called to be the Governor of Bengal and little afterwards to be the first Governor-General of free India, during the course of the interim Government. Jawaharlal wanted him to be the first Rashtrapati of Free India. But that was not to be. The choice of the people for the highest position in the state fell upon another great patriot and man of learning, Rajendra Babu. Afterwards Jawaharlal called him to join the Central Cabinet as Minister without portfolio, and after the death of Sardar, as the Home Minister. But, however great may have been Jawaharlal's opinion about Rajaji, it was not possible for these two great men to pull on together in the Cabinet for long. Rajaji soon resigned. He never took the public into con-

science. A piliant Governor, Shri Prakash, obliged the Congress Party to which he himself belonged. He called Rajaji to form the Government. Rajaji, who had not contested the election, was nominated by the Governor to the upper house as a literary person, as if his literary abilities were discovered then for the first time! As soon as Rajaji took office, he announced that he would dissolve the Assembly

By J. B. KRIPALANI

if he did not command the majority. Soon there were defections from other parties, and the Congress had the requisite majority. However Rajaji's Chief Ministership did not last long. Rajaji had accepted to be the Chief Minister on the clear understanding that the Centre would support him. This support was not forthcoming, when Rajaji was obliged to resign



fidence about the cause of his resignation. But those who knew the two men understood the gulf that divided them. It was in their respective upbringing, character and outlook on life that separated them, whatever their opinion of each others' merits.

Chief Minister

Rajaji was chosen as a leader of the Congress Party after the first General Election in Free India in 1952 & became the Chief Minister of united Madras. The Congress had failed to secure a majority in the Assembly. Prakashan, the State leader of K.M.P.P., had come to an understanding with the Communist Party to form a Coalition Government, which commanded a majority in the Assembly. But Congress men have always been reluctant to part with power. Therefore, the Congress Party in Madras and at the Centre conceived the plan, to ask the Governor not to call the leader of the coalition, but to call Rajaji, the leader of the party, which had failed to secure a majority in the Assembly, to form the Government.

on the issue of introducing craft work in primary schools. In this he was right and his opponents were entirely wrong. Rajaji also lost the goodwill of the members of the Assembly, by directing that no legislator should approach the officers except through the Chief Minister or the Ministers concerned. This episode of the mode of forming a ministry paved the way to defections, which in after years have plagued Indian politics and made politician a by-word of contempt. It also opened the way for the Governors to exercise their discretion in favour of the ruling party in the formation of ministries.

However, this did not end Rajaji's political career. He always took keen interest in the affairs of his country. At the advanced age of eighty, he formed a new party, as he thought that the Congress was not properly handling the affairs of the country and there was a tendency towards the rule of one person by which the freedom of the citizen and his initiative would be lost. He wanted to call the

new party the Conservative Party of India. But his companions thought that the word 'Conservative' would denote in these days 'reaction' in the public mind. The new party was therefore called The Swatantra Party. It stands for Democracy, the freedom of the individual and his unfettered initiative. It also stands for the rule of law & the due process of law. Rajaji was a liberal in politics, liberal in the best connotation of that term.

Whatever cause Rajaji took up, he brought to it his earnestness, determination and indomitable will. It is true that he often advocated lost causes, as in the case of his scheme of reform in education or prohibition or opposition to artificial methods of birth control. He was never enthused by sentiments and passions. He was preeminently the intellectual. His forensic skill was unmatched. It was always difficult to argue with him. He would overwhelm his opponents not only by logical arguments, but bring to his aid simile, metaphor, fable and anecdotes. But by these means, he could not always convince his opponents. In the case of Gandhiji, it was different. He would not try to defeat his opponent in argument but convince him by the clear enunciation of his stand and his sincere conviction. Unbeatable as Rajaji was in argument, he had also the capacity of reducing his critics to silence by one sentence. Mrs. Gandhi, as the Prime Minister, once criticised Rajaji. His reply was "I first met Indira at the age of three. It seems she has not grown since."

Rajaji's literary accomplishments were great. He was a prolific writer, not only in his mother tongue Tamil, but also in English. He wrote books on religion, philosophy and politics. But he did not forget the children. He wrote for them too. His learning was as massive and solid as that of the old pandits, bereft of their orthodoxy. He may be said to be the modern Bhishm Pitamah who had eat nobody's salt. He was not subservient to anybody, except to the truth he saw at the time. It was be no truth, but it was so for him. He was a man of universal courtesy. His manners were perfect. Even when he hit hard, he remained calm and collected.

Rajaji was a great journalist. He was put in charge of 'Young India' when Gandhiji was convicted of sedition and awarded six years imprisonment in 1922. Rajaji founded the weekly 'Swaraj'. He wrote in it from week to week and often two articles in the week. He continued writing in this paper almost to his very end. One often looked for Rajaji's views on any crucial problem that confronted the country. He is no more with us; but his countrymen will always remember him. They will feel a void in the national life, which cannot be easily filled (Publication Syndicate).