

Rajaji's Philosophy

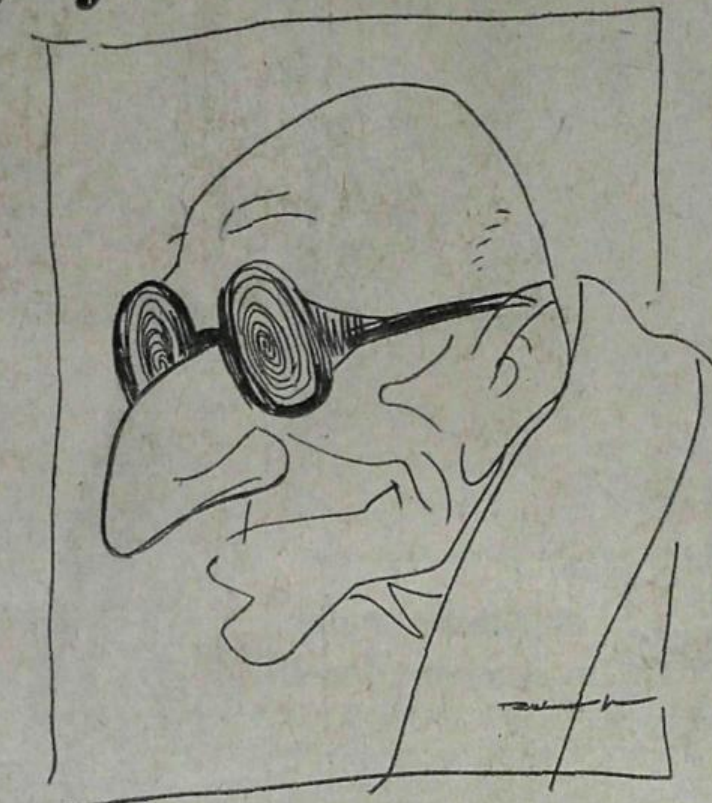
IT is remarkable that many tributes which have been paid to Rajaji's greatness point out that he was an intellectual of quality. Regrettably, intellectuals in India have played an ineffectual role in the shaping of thinking in the country, Rajaji is an exception; it is permissible to argue that he was able to make a significant contribution primarily because his thinking was rooted in his experience of public life.

The core of Rajaji's social philosophy is his conception of the freedom of the individual; that, indeed, is the philosophic basis of the new party which he founded (Swatantra means self-direction). "The fundamental importance of maintaining the freedom of the individual in a modern state will not be questioned by any one," he wrote in 1958. "The need for safeguarding this precious fundamental of human happiness is all the greater on account of the expansionist tendency of the modern state". Democracy cannot be justified and wealth will not increase unless the freedom of the individual to work, earn, keep and invest his earnings according to his free judgment is preserved.

Does not this doctrine go counter to the experience of the working of *laissez-faire* in England in the nineteenth century and elsewhere? Rajaji is careful to point out that individual freedom has to be subjected to checks when it tends to become anti-social or it is used for exploitation—exploitation is the use of the weakness of another for one's self-advancement. These two checks on liberty, in Rajaji's view, provide a reasonable basis for all the essential regulations of the government to protect the weaker sections of society and yet to preserve the basic freedom of the individual.

Rajaji referred to another check on the freedom of the individual: You cannot disregard law and authority with impunity. In an address to Benares Hindu University in December, 1948, he told the students in memorable words, "We must restore the unqualified reverence for the state that was cultivated by our ancestors, the reverence for law and discipline... that was insisted upon in the old days." He noted with understanding that the movement of non-cooperation involved the disregard of law and authority; but that law and authority had been imposed by a foreign government and the unhealthy habit must be given up under a national government.

But what is law? Rajaji makes an original contribution in suggesting that law is not whatever is enacted by a majority but something that rests on permanent principles and is inherent in the conscience of a community. It is the rule of law, as thus rightly understood, that supports and holds together a community, not the Australian conception of law. The authoritarian notion that the will of the majority in Parliament is law is only part of the truth; it tempts the government to enact amendments to the Constitution whenever the Supreme Court gives a decision against the government. "There is a law of laws which must be respected if democracy is to be consistent with civilization." The Sanskrit word *dharma*,



in his view, denotes it best; it means "to sustain".

From these basic principles Rajaji developed a conception of the sphere of the state which goes counter to popular notions. Perhaps no thinker in contemporary India, Gandhiji excepted, has argued the case for minimum government so logically and consistently as Rajaji. In his view, it would be wise for the present generation in our country to limit the main activities of the government to the task of collecting taxes and preventing violence, fraud and exploitation. In going beyond this field and trying to control the processes of production, for instance, the state is trying to do what it cannot do efficiently.

"The administrative machine as well as the political party that controls it are composed of men who not only do not produce but do not have any experience of real knowledge of the processes of production... It is forgotten that national production is made up of individual production and that this is best furthered through that full and accurate knowledge and right judgment which follow from personal interest. The function of the state must be to prevent mutual conflict and injury and no more, certainly not to substitute itself for the individual."

Progress must mean only advance towards a desirable and laudable goal. "The extinction of human dignity and individual freedom in order to 'progress' vitiates the nature of progress itself. Progress achieved by losing self-direction (swatantra) and giving more and more, and finally all direction, to the state, is not progress." Self-government essentially means self-reliance, self-restraint, self-discipline, self-denial, self-direction as contrasted with a system of government which places unlimited power in

the state and its officials, to restrain, control and direct and, hence, compulsorily to enslave and regiment the individual.

Is this analysis satisfying? The functions that the state should undertake relative to circumstances. The conception of least government is not universally applicable. In an underdeveloped society—large, poor, diseased, illiterate—obviously the state will have to undertake many more functions than in a small, developed society where there is no poverty and where the people may be expected more and more to take care of themselves. In other words, Rajaji's ideas of self-help and self-direction are good in certain circumstances, not in all; their applicability must be considered in relation to a particular society.

The principle which will find general acceptance in relation to the functions of the state over and above the minimum function of collecting taxes, preventing violence, fraud and exploitation is this: where the people can do the necessary things by themselves, the state should not interfere, but where the state alone can do them, there should be *prima facie* no objection to the state taking up those functions.

Rajaji has something useful to say on democracy, specially on the duty of the citizen and of the leaders. No theory of civil life will work satisfactorily unless the citizens in a democracy are willing to undertake the responsibility of thinking and judging for themselves. He himself is an example of a great dissenter, not conforming to the general trend of opinion, if such opinion went against his informed judgment as when he opposed the Quit India movement. He was certain that, if the habit of independent thinking is not developed among citizens, democracy would prove itself to be a house of cards.

This requirement of democracy imposes a duty on the leaders—the legislator, the minister, the editor, the teacher—to lead, and not to follow, the mass. The greatest danger to democracy and therefore to civilization, in his view, is when the leaders of men, instead of leading, begin to be led by what they consider to be the trend of public opinion. To surrender one's conscience and suggest solutions simply because they are popular, instead of trying to convince the people of what one believes to be right, is neither morally nor politically right.

On the secular state, Rajaji's clarification is valuable: when the Indian Constitution laid down that India shall be a secular state, it was not intended that the state should discourage or be hostile towards religion, but that what was intended was impartiality towards all creeds and denominations. It was a refusal to accept the theory that different religions made different nations or that the state should belong to one religion more than another. Religion and the restraints it imposes are of inestimable value to society; not an indifference to religion but a tolerant and broadminded appreciation of all creeds and denominations is the essence of secularism.

Perhaps the analytical clarity of Rajaji shows itself at its best in his views on socialism; he was clear that socialism, if it is equated with nationalization of the means of production, spells disaster. He pointed out the basic defects of socialism, as he saw them: Class struggle, the foundation of the socialist analysis, is no solution for unjust distribution, for "class struggle means hatred, a fouling of the atmosphere, unhappiness for all and submission to the crudest type of tyranny at the end"; self-alienation, that is, men selling their selves away to the state, is a great potential danger of socialism; there are no rights in the socialist countries except for those who agree with the dictatorial rule of a minority in control; management of business by state officials is notoriously inefficient; nepotism and corruption thrive in such conditions; socialism substitutes indifference for the vigilance born of personal interest, the irresponsibility of monopoly for the eager interest that goes with private ownership, competition, and profit motive; the "entire ideology of socialism is based on a huge fallacy that creative energy can be isolated from personal interest". If the economic life of the people and of every individual must be under complete regulation, the rulers will easily see that they must obtain willing obedience to such regulation and this will lead to totalitarian control of thought or of culture in a state which is run on the theory of complete economic state control of the citizens' life. What the state should do is to watch, control, and regulate production and distribution to prevent exploitation; by entering business it will be depriving itself of its governmental function. Modern trends in the theory and practice of socialism, especially in England, have ceased to equate socialism with nationalization of the means of production. Its essence, in the modern view, is society's responsibility for the welfare of all. With this, Rajaji would have no quarrel.

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January 6, 1973

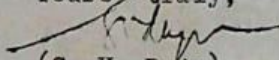
Dear Sir,

For purposes of record and particularly in connection with the forthcoming National Convention, we wish to obtain four copies each of your issue from December 20, when Rajaji was admitted to the hospital, till the 4th of January.

We shall of course be glad to pay the cost involved.

Thanking you,

Yours truly,


(S. V. Raju)

Executive Secretary

The Circulation Manager,

Bombay.
