

MADRAS PRESIDENCY UNDER CONGRESS RULE

RAJAJI

Early Days

Rajagopalachariyar, popularly known as Rajaji was born in village Thorappalli near Osur in Salem district as the third son of Nallaan Chakkaravarthi Iyyangar and Chinkarammal on 10th December, 1878. After becoming a law graduate in 1898, he began his career as an advocate in Salem by 1900. He became popular in his profession.

His involvement in the struggle for freedom Rajaji, with his special features of straight forwardness, courage, independence, regularity, intelligence and god-fearing involved himself in politics and attracted the attention of both the people and leaders. Within a short period by his participation in several organisations he achieved a name for himself. When he had involved himself completely in the freedom struggle he was forced to forego his profession which fetched him high income. He represented Tamilnadu in the congress conference held at Calcutta in 1906. He met Mahakavi Bharathiyar, who was a great patriot of freedom struggle with his inspiring songs, at Puthucheery in 1910. He was the chairman of Salem municipality between the period 1917-1919. Having attracted by extremist principles of Tilak, he became an extremist in the beginning. Then attracted by the non-violent principles of Gandhiji he offered his whole-hearted support to non-cooperation movement in 1920. In the same year by June, he attended the meeting of Hindus and Muslims in favour of Kilaphat movement. He was elected general secretary of All India Congress in 1921. Then by 1922 at the request of Gandhiji he became the editor of Young India, a weekly published from Ahmadabad.

Ashram at Tiruchengode

When Rajaji was active in politics, the justice party was very popular in Tamilnadu. Belonging to the Brahmin community, he was severely criticised by the

Justice party. But inspite of all these oppositions, he established an ashram at Tiruchengode just like Gandhiji's ashram at Samarbathi. This ashram was inaugurated by E.V.R. From 1925 to 1935, Rajaji stayed in this ashram and served the people of that locality who were the most backward. He increased the medical facilities in that locality and worked against the drunkenness and untouchability found among those people. In his newspaper, Vimochanam, preference was given for the propagation of prohibition. Highly attracted by the doctrines of Gandhiji, he gave preference to the production of Khadhi in his ashram. The youngsters who got training in his ahsram became a set of disciplined soldiers of freedom.

When Rajaji was in Tiruchengode ashram Gandhiji visited the ashram in 1925 and 1934 and appreciated his endeavour. Moreover, Sarthar Vallabai Patel, G.D. Birla, Nehru, Kumarappa, Sathyamurthi, Lal Bhagadur Sastri, Thuckher Baba, Kirupalani, Mother Kasthuri Bhiganthi and the like, visited his ashram and added credit to his valuable service.

Rajaji and salt Sathyagraha:

With the incoming of Gandhiji, the struggle against the English by the Indian National Congress strengthened. Announcing the non-co-operation movement as part of violating the law, Gandhiji started the historically important salt satyagraha in 1930. When Gandhi started salt Styagraha at Dandi in Tamilnadu, Rajaji was assigned the responsiblity to conduct salt Styagraha. He conducted it successfully at Vedaranyam in spite of strong opposition. Rajaji followed by a hundred freedom fighters walked over to Vedaranyam on 15 April, 1930 to conduct salt Satyagraha. He was arrested and imprisoned for violating salt law. In continuation of that, he participated in several struggles and was given imprisonment many time.

The election of 1937 and his chief-ministership:

Thoroughly dissatisfied by the activities of Justice party, people selected Congress party with a majority in the legislative assembly election held in 1937. Becoming the chief minister of Tamilnadu, on behalf of the congress party, Rajaji brought about several reforms towards the welfare of the people.

Prohibition Act:

Drunkedness was a great social evil in those days. It not only affected the health of the people but also led to many social evils. To put an end to this evil, Rajaji passed an act of prohibition. But the proper execution of this act become less effective with the opposition of people, government officials and the owners of liquor shops.

Welfare committee for the peasants:

When Congress party came to power in Tamilnadu majority of the lands were owned by landlords. Having high socio political influence, these landlords used landless peasants to cultivate this land. The condition of the peasants were miserable as they were treated as slaves and given, very small remuneration. To reorganise the life of these miserable peasants who lived in the manor land of landlords, Rajaji constituted a committee. The committee under T.Prakasam, the Finance Minister visited the manor land, studied the condition of the peasants and submitted a report to the government. Just at this movement, the Second World War broke out. As India was involved in the war without the consonance of India leaders, Rajaji's ministry resigned in 1939, as per the decision of the headquarters. Hence Rajaji was unable to pass any act towards the welfare of the peasants on the basis of the report submitted to the government.

Steps against untouchability:

Though Rajaji belonged to Brahmin community, he vehemently protested the caste difference. The removal of untouchability was not only patronised but

also executed by him. He admitted his son in the college where low caste students were studying. For these reasons, he was kept apart by the high caste and they abstained from having any relation with him. When he was the chairman of Salem municipality, he engaged a scheduled caste to open the water supply scheme. He appointed low castes to work in the college hostels. Further more, he invited some members of the downtrodden people to his house and gave them samabanthi feast. Encouraging the inter-caste marriage, he gave his daughter in marriage to Devadhas Gandhi, son of Gandhiji who belonged to Gujarat Paniya caste. Low caste people were deprived of entry into temple till Rajaji came to power. But Rajaji gave entry to the low castes of Tamil land just as it has taken place at Cochin and Travancore.

Mot against Hindi :

Assuming the power in Tamilnadu/ he made Hindi compulsory in schools because he felt that learning hind was good to all people. This was opposed by D.K. under the leadership of E.V.R. Thousands of students and common people participated in this struggle and opposed the government of Rajaji. Predicting Hindi as the language of Brahmins, the members of D.K. held processions and conferences against Hindi. The conference at Salem was significant among them. Severe steps including firing were taken to suppress the riot, two died of firing. Thousand and two hundred people including E.V.R. were arrested. Still the struggle continued till the resignation of Rajaji's ministry on 29 October, 1939. Governor James Hope who took up the administration of Tamilnadu not only stopped the compulsory introduction of Hindi in schools but also released all the prisoners of the struggle and thus established peace in Tamil land.

Difference of opinion within the congress:

There evolved a stumbling block in Indian politics in 1942. Muslims demanded separate land under the leadership of Janaff Jinna. But this demand was

abruptly refused by the Congress. Realising the nature of Muslims and the political procedure of the English, Rajaji suggested the separation of Pakistan through voting. This resolution being refused by the Congress, Rajaji quit Congress party and kept aloof from politics. When he was desirous, of joining the congress again in 1945 members of .Congress in Tamilnadu opposed it. But he became a congress member with the support of the Indian congress leaders and served in the Central Ministry, headed by Nehru, as the ministry for Trade and Industry in. 1946. Then he became the Governor of Bengal in 1947. Then he acted as the first Indian Governor General from 1948 to 20th January, 1950 after Lord Mount Batton had left for England. From January to November of 1951, he held the post of Home Minister.

Becoming the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu Again:

In the assembly election held in 1952, congress could not get majority on its own. Desiring to form the ministry with the help of some independent members, the congress sought the help of Rajaji and offered him the Chief Ministership. Some thought that Rajaji would not accept the offer because he had already assumed high posts. Contrary to this opinion, Rajaji gracefully accepted the invitation of Ramaraj and Kumaraswamiraja and became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu for the second time M.Baktavatsalam, A.P. Vetti, C. Subramoniam, K. Venkataswami Naidu, Raja Sammuka Rajeswara Sethupathi, M.A. Manickavellu, K.A. Kutty Krishnan, S.P.P. Pattabiramarow, D. Sanchivyya, K. Rajaram Naidu, Thirumathi Jothi Yenkatachalam and R. Renganna Naidu were the fifteen members in the Ministry of Rajaji. In spite of the internal and external opposition to his Ministry several reforms were implemented by Rajaji's Ministry.

(i) Control of price of Commodities:

The Second World War caused the increase in the price of the commodities. This gave a lot of sufferings to ordinary peoples. So necessary commodities were

distributed the people through ration shops. Utilising this opportunity officials who were related to this ration were bribed by the merchants, this in turn led to the hoarding of necessary commodities. With the efficient steps taken by the government the black marketing and the bribing of officials were restricted. As a result, the price of the commodities were reduced all on a sudden.

New educational policy:

Aspiring to bring about changes in the field of education. Rajaji introduced shift system in the educational institutions in 1953. Students who learned their lessons in the morning shift were expected to learn some work in the afternoon. Those who learned their lessons in the after noon session were expected to do some work in the fore noon. Rajaji anticipated the learning of traditional works by the students from their parents, thereby abolition of unemployment problem. Not realising the real effect of this system, a storm of opposition arose in Tamil land against the new educational policy. The opposition party vehemently criticised this scheme as Caste oriented educational scheme. This opposition threw Rajaji out of power.

Rajaji's Resignation:

Rajaji's progressive thinking created internal conflict in the party. Kamaraj too protested the reforms of Rajaji. This led to the difference of opinion between Rajaji and Kamaraj and hence Rajaji resigned his chief ministership on April 13, 1954. The very next day Kamaraj assumed power as the chief minister of Tamilnadu.

The appraisal of Swatandra party:

Thoroughly dissatisfied with the congress party Rajaji started a new party, Swatandra Party in 1959 and acted as its leader until his end. Later, he patronised D.M.K. and supported the cause of anti-hindi agitation. In 1962 he made tour to

London, New York and Washington as a representative of peace among the world countries.

His service to Tamil language:

Rajaji was famous in expressing things in simple and sweet Tamil language. He wrote philosophical articles in beautiful Tamil. He had also written Mahabharatha as Viyasarvirutham and Valmiki Ramayana as Sakravarthi Thirumagal. Moreover, he wrote religious, philosophical books like Kannan Kattiyavazhi, Upanidathaba palakani and Baja Govindam. A great man, who was equally intelligent in politics and in Tamil literature, died on the 25th day of December, 1972.

An estimate:

Rajaji was a simple and dear thinker. He believed in the freedom of individuals. As an opponent of the British he favoured non-co-operation, but after his resignation from office, cooperated with the British. As a chief minister, Rajaji introduced Hindi but as a Swatantra leader opposed Hindi. He started his career as a nationalist in the congress party but ended his career as a regionalist in alliance with the D.M.K.