



C. RAJAGOPALACHARI



Lok Sabha Secretariat
New Delhi



C.RAJAGOPALACHARI

An ardent patriot, a pioneering social reformer, incisive thinker, profound scholar, astute statesman, a renowned lawyer, an able administrator and above all a humanist—Chakravarti Rajagopalachari—endearingly called ‘Rajaji’ by his admirers and followers—was born on 10 December 1878 in Thorappalli village in Salem district of Madras* Province. His father, Chakravarti Iyengar, also known as Venkata Arya, was the Munsif of Hosur Taluka. Rajagopalachari had his early education at his village school. He graduated from the Central Hindu College, Bangalore** and joined the Law College in Madras*** city. In 1899, having passed the Bachelor of Law examination, he started practice at Salem. Endowed with superb articulation and a unique skill, he soon established himself as one of the most brilliant lawyers of Salem.

The decision to partition Bengal on communal lines by Lord Curzon came as a bolt from the blue to Rajagopalachari and his associates. Rajagopalachari was influenced by the call of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak which exhorted every Indian to fight for complete freedom from the British Rule. He accepted Tilak, who had sacrificed everything—worldly comfort, material progress and official recognition, as his mentor. Rajagopalachari enlisted himself as a member of the Indian National Congress.

In July 1917, Rajagopalachari was nominated as the Chairman of the Salem Municipality. He saw it as an opportunity to serve the people, to demonstrate his administrative skills and to bring relief to the poor and the downtrodden. He extended water supply to areas where the untouchables lived. Under his direction, more schools accepted the children belonging to the backward classes and the untouchables. Rajagopalachari’s political activities and municipal duties left him with little time to pursue his legal career. But he handled his duties with confidence.

* Now known as Tamil Nadu.

** Now known as Bengaluru.

*** Now known as Chennai.

A zamindar of Tiruchengode, near district Salem, gifted four acres of land to Rajagopalachari for an Ashram which was formally inaugurated in February 1925. Rajagopalachari conceived the idea of having a hospital with a qualified doctor in the Ashram. He explained to villagers the evils of drinking by citing the example of many families which had been ruined by this bad habit. He also told villagers that they could improve their economic status by taking to cottage industries. Accompanied by his close associates, Rajagopalachari also moved into the neighbouring villages carrying the message of rural reconstruction. Public enthusiasm was roused and the Ashram became the hub of rural work. The Ashram published two magazines, *Vimochanam* (Liberation) in Tamil and *Prohibition* in English. The *Vimochanam* catered to the need of the villagers. Adult education formed a major part of the programme of the Ashram. Rajagopalachari lived in a small cottage. He enlarged the activities of the Ashram. Bee-keeping became a paying hobby. Manufacturing soaps, using non-edible oils, provided work for many. Stress on production of good quality seeds, better manuring and organised cultivation proved beneficial. Health and sanitation programmes reduced the intensity of diseases. Simple and community living gave the Ashram an exceptional serenity. All these made Rajagopalachari the friend of the poor, and the guide and preceptor to whom the people turned for advice and solace.

On 12 March 1930, Gandhiji planned to set out on his historic *Dandi March*. In the Madras Province, Rajagopalachari led the long march to the sea coast to break the Salt Law. He planned the march from Tiruchi to Vedaranyam. On 13 April 1930, the party, led by Rajagopalachari started from Tiruchi. People boldly joined the party for the success of the march. The party received warm welcome all along the route at Tanjore, Kumbhakonam, Tiruthiraipoondi, etc. For 16 days, the party, headed by Rajagopalachari marched to reach Vedaranyam. They bent down and picked up a handful of salt and were immediately arrested. The arrest was followed by a quick trial following which Rajagopalachari was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Waves of *satyagrahis* moved to Vedaranyam. Thousands broke the Salt Law. Thousands were beaten on the fists and palms on which they sported the precious salt. Rajaji emerged from the Vedaranyam Satyagraha as a national hero.

On 14 July 1937, Rajagopalachari assumed the office of the Prime Minister of the then Madras Province. Civil Service, at the higher level, was manned mostly by Englishmen, who, for the first time, had to take orders from Indians. Rajagopalachari brought about the resurrection of confidence between the permanent service and the elected representatives by his enlightened policy. He gave enough powers to the officials to carry out the policies. He indicated that policies, once decided by the Ministry, should be given proper shape and format by the officials. Rajagopalachari enjoyed the support of the Governor, Lord Erskine. He inducted a *Dalit* as a member of the Cabinet and proved that he truly abhorred all caste prejudices. Eager to raise the standard of living of the *Dalits*; who mostly formed the agricultural labour, Rajagopalachari sought the abolition of *Zamindari*. The main thrust of Rajagopalachari's Government was social and economic reforms. On both these fronts, Rajagopalachari achieved great success. Other programmes which Rajagopalachari pursued with great fervour were the propagation of *Khadi*, promotion of *village* industries and the introduction of *Hindi* in schools.

Rajagopalachari's perspective on most of the national issues was his own. Rajaji was known to be a fierce defender of his political ideals, and did not hesitate to oppose his closest aides and friends in public. He had his own views on the Quit India Movement.

After Independence, Rajagopalachari was appointed the Governor of West Bengal. His simplicity, total absence of posturing and ostentation, perfect harmony with the politicians in charge of affairs and boundless love for the people made him an ideal head of the State. In 1947, when the term of Lord Mountbatten, the first Governor-General of Independent India, ended, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari was chosen to take his place. He moved round the country, met people, heard their problems and tried to resolve them through the normal channels of administration. He assuaged the feelings of Muslims, appealed to them to forget the past and join the national mainstream and become an inseparable part of our secular society.

After the death of Sardar Patel in December 1950, Rajagopalachari was appointed the Home Minister. He piloted the Preventive Detention Act in Parliament which invited critical comments from the opposition. Even many

Congressmen felt that the Act smacked of authoritarianism. But Rajagopalachari, defending the move stated that the minimum powers, necessary to ensure the security of the Nation had to be assumed by the Government. His advice was sought with regard to the preparation of the First Five-Year Plan, handling of the delicate Kashmir question and in making preparations for the first national elections under the new Constitution. In December 1951, he resigned from the Central Cabinet.

In the general elections, held in 1952, Congress suffered a reverse in the Madras Province. On 29 March 1952, the Madras Congress passed a resolution moved by C. Subramaniam calling upon Rajagopalachari to take over the leadership of the Congress Party in the State Legislature. Rajagopalachari acceded to the request of the Party in spite of his ill health. He discouraged the tendency on the part of legislators to interfere in the day-to-day administration. He directed the MLAs to work in their constituencies and keep in touch with the people.

In recognition of his commendable service to the nation Rajagopalachari was awarded 'Bharat Ratna' in 1954. He was the first to receive this highest civilian award.

Rajaji formed Swatantra Party in 1959 which actively campaigned for a market economy. Swatantra Party, according to Rajaji, was less of a political party and more of a movement. He was convinced that various controls affected the nation adversely. As the Chief Minister of Madras State, one of his first acts was to decontrol the distribution of foodgrains and their prices.

In 1962, Rajagopalachari led a delegation of the Gandhi Peace Foundation to the USA to plead for a ban on nuclear tests. Rajagopalachari came back hopeful of the result of his personal contact with President Kennedy. Rajagopalachari also visited the United Nations. The then Secretary-General, U. Thant, welcomed Rajagopalachari and listened to his suggestion that the General Assembly should pass a resolution calling upon both the USA and the USSR to stop all nuclear tests. Rajagopalachari pleaded that the General Assembly should make a serious bid to bring about a total ban on nuclear tests and exhorted the UN to hold out the threat of expulsion from the world body if the nations failed to observe the ban on nuclear proliferation.

On 25 December 1972, at the age of 93 years, this eminent statesman and great son of Mother India joined the galaxy of immortals. As a legacy, he left behind him a great treasure of his political, philosophical and literary works which would remain as asset to this nation for all times to come. On his passing away, the entire nation—the Parliament, the State Legislatures, the Press, leaders from all walks of life and dignitaries from abroad mourned the sad demise of this great son of India.

While paying glowing tributes to the departed soul, the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi said:

"...his eminence was not the kind that was derived from the offices he held. It came from within him, from his extraordinary, sharp and powerful intellect and his dedication to the cause not merely of India but of mankind..."

In Lok Sabha, offering his condolences, the then Speaker, Dr. G.S. Dhillon said:

"Rare are the moments in the history of the nation when its people, irrespective of caste, creed, political affiliation... mourn the death of a man who had earned distinction amongst them. Rajaji, as he was popularly known, was a man who, by virtue of his sacrifices and simplicity, became an institution by himself. ..."

In Rajya Sabha, the then Vice-President and Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Shri G.S. Pathak said:

"...Rajagopalachari was the embodiment of the best in Indian life and culture, a far-sighted statesman and an outstanding scholar who for over fifty years was in the front-line of the country's leadership..."