

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari Was An Architect Of Freedom Struggle In Tamilnadu

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ABSTRACT

The National awakening assumed dimensions in India in the twentieth century when the elites emerged as social and political leaders. One such towering personality was Rajagopalachari. His dedication to the national cause and his untiring struggle against the British rule earned him a significant place in the history of the freedom movement. Rajaji was a true follower of Gandhiji who followed the Gandhian path of life in thought, word and action. His whole career was a record of self confidence, courage, fearlessness and innovations based on Gandhian concepts.

Key words:

Untouchability, Pioneer, satyagraha Quit India, revolt, Sabha

Introduction:

The National awakening assumed new dimensions in India in the Twentieth Century when the elites emerged as social and political leaders. One such towering personality was Rajagopalachari popularly known as Rajaji his dedication to the national cause and his untiring struggle against the British rule earned him a significant place in the history of the freedom movement. He was a true follower of Gandhiji. Gandhiji's policy of truth and non-violence could not be followed easily but Rajaji had taken up Gandhi's principles at once in the Madras Presidency. Rajaji made a speech at Tiruchirappalli on January 16th, 1919, and he felt that the

Rowlatt Act would lead to the permanent disablement to the national life, and he complained that many leaders did not feel danger, For Rajaji, the Rowlatt Bill was “serious enough for an anxious examination of the principles and prosperity of opposing it with entire soul”. His speech had a very decisive and significant impact among the people. Rajaji had resigned as Chairman of Salem Municipality on 7th February 1919 and he shifted the centre of his political activities to Madras.¹

Rajaji invited Gandhiji to Madras through Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, who was then the President of Local Anti – Rowlatt Committee.² Gandhiji came to Madras with Mahadev Desai, who was his personal secretary on 18th March 1919³ and he stayed as a guest of Rajaji.⁴ This was the first intimate contact between them. Gandhiji launched the Non Co-operation movement on 1st August 1920. Rajaji gave shape and direction to the Non Co-operation Movement in Tamil Nadu. Rajaji had emerged as a lieutenant of Gandhi in the south. When the annual session of the Indian National Congress was held at Nagpur in December 1920 under the Presidentship of C. Vijayaraghavachari, Rajaji was elected the General Secretary of the Indian National Congress along with Motilal Nehru and M.A.Ansari.⁵ Rajaji and others accepted the non co-operation programmes of boycotting the elections, courts of law, educational institutions, resignation from the government positions and the surrender of official titles and honours. Rajaji toured many parts of the Madras Presidency and he was responsible in politing Gandhi’s non-violent, Non Co-operation as the instrument of national liberation. Rajaji asked the public “not to fall into the trap set by repression and commit violence”.⁶ Gandhi, the massive leader of the nation commenced the Salt Satyagraha March on 12th March 1930 at Dandi beach from the Sabarmathi Ashram. Rajaji’s famous Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha March was familiar to Gandhi’s Dandi March which had strong impacts in Madras Presidency.

The Salt Satyagraha Movement was launched in Tamil Nadu in 1930. The Tamil Nadu Congress, though deserted by many veterans, succeeded in finding a suitable leader at this hour of necessity. It was of course, Rajaji who was a veteran leader of the non co-operation movement. The Tamil Nadu Congress meeting was held in April, 1930 in Vellore. Rajaji was elected the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. Rajaji applied his mind in selecting a

suitable place for breaking the Salt Law. Kanyakumari came to his mind, since it is situated at the confluence of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. But unfortunately Kanyakumari was a part of the State of Travancore. The Congress had decided not to conduct satyagraha in places situated in the Native States. Therefore Rajaji selected Vedaranyam or Thirumaraikadu.⁷ Vedaranyam was chosen as the 'Battle Field' because, it had certain advantages. The Agasthiampalli salt factory was situated near Vedaranyam. It was at Vedaranyam that the Tamil Nadu Congress conference was held in 1929. It was also the home town of Vedarathinam Pillai who was an active Congress worker and licensee of the Agasthiampalli salt factory.⁸ Rajaji planned that the march should take a circuitous route via Kumbakonam, Valangaiman, Chemmangudi, Needamangalam and Tiruthuraipoondi. He had chosen the route because he expected that the marchers would be received hospitably in the places on the route. Committees that involving pioneers, hygiene and food were some of the fifteen committees that Rajaji organized for the smooth conduct of the March. Each committee consisted of one or two devotee volunteers as members.

The Government of Madras formulated a series of preventive measures to deal with the salt satyagraha movement of Rajaji in accordance with the policy of the Government of India. It ordered the District Officers to organize public meetings to impress upon the Congress programme. It decided to make preventive arrests to the participants in the satyagraha. It decided to censor all news items connected to the Vedaranyam Satyagraha. Repressive measures were undertaken against the editors of the nationalist newspapers. Parents were threatened of the volunteers and leaders were intercepted. Village officers and Government servants were warned of dire consequence in case of their support to the satyagrahis under Rule 23 of the Government Servants Conduct Rules.⁹ Rajaji and his volunteers were welcomed at all places including Tanjore. Rajaji selected 12 volunteers from among the satyagrahis to join him in breaking the salt law on 30th April, 1930. At about 6 A.M. Rajaji picked up salt and raised the slogan "Vante Mataram". The Deputy Superintendent of Police arrested Rajaji and took him to Mannargudi. Rajaji was presented before the Sub-Divisional Magistrate in Mannargudi. Rajaji did not defend his case and he was convicted by the Magistrate under section 145 of I.P.C., read with section 74 of the Salt Act. He was sentenced to

six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs.200. Rajaji had preferred additional three months imprisonment was imposed additionally. From the historic references it is inferred that under the leadership of Rajaji, the Vedaranyam Salt Movement was organized systematically and successfully. The success was due to the enthusiastic involvement and volunteer ship of peoples especially from all the parts of Tamil Nadu. Following the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (5th March 1931), the people manufactured their own salt at many places. At Vedaranyam, people made their own salt and its victory was celebrated. On 15th October 1940 at Wardha, Gandhi discussed his plan if Individual Satyagraha with Rajaji, Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabbai Patel, Abdul Kalam Asad and others. The individual Satyagraha Movement was organized in almost all parts of the Madras Presidency. Rajaji was arrested on 3rd December and sentenced to one year imprisonment. Gandhi decided to start the Quit India movement on 9th August itself, but he and other Congress leaders were arrested on 9th morning before starting Quit India Movement. When all eminent Congress leaders including Gandhi were in jail, the task of finding a solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem was taken by Rajaji, and he believed that the key to the solution of India's problem lay in adopting a sympathetic attitude towards the demands of the Muslim League. As early as 23rd April 1942, he convened a meeting of the Madras Congress Legislative Party and arranged a resolution to be passed for a congress League accord. However, when he subsequently moved the same resolution at a meeting of the A.I.C.C., it was rejected by 120 votes to 15. He was, in fact, among the first to accept the idea of Pakistan and to advocate the Congress to accept it. His famous formula was published on 10th July 1944.¹⁰ His formula was a bold move and the first recognition of the idea of Pakistan. In his words: "I stand for Pakistan because I do not want that State where we Hindus and Muslims are both not honoured. Let Muslims have Pakistan. Lord Mountbatten assumed the office of the viceroy on March 24th 1947. He accepted the idea of Pakistan not as it was prepared by Jinnah but as later modified by C.R.Formula. He announced his plan on 3rd June 1947 and it proved for the establishment of two separate Dominions of India and Pakistan. Mountbatten's plan was merely another name for the C.R.Formula. Then the Indian independence bill was passed on 18th July, by the British Parliament and it provided for the partition of India and the establishments of the two Dominions of India and Pakistan. The transfer of power was very graceful; it was an event unique

in history and was considered a peace without war without blood. The British rule came to an end on the Indian soil on August 15th, 1947 after the declaration of independence, Rajaji was appointed the first Indian Governor of West Bengal from 15th August onwards because of the Hindu-Muslim Problem there. He reduced the problem between the two communities and won the hearts of the people by his attitudes and approaches. He became the first and the last Indian Governor-General of India (June 1948 – January 1950) in succession to Mountbatten. Thus in every walk of life as a leader of the nation he served the people of India throughout the long-drawn political struggle for independence.

Conclusion

A colonial Governor called Rajaji the ‘wisest man in India’. This sentiment was endorsed by Gandhi who described him as the “keeper of my conscience”. Indeed, Rajaji was an architect of freedom struggle in Tamil Nadu. He was the true disciple of Gandhi and the doyen among Indian fighters for freedom and the dauntless champion of the downtrodden millions of the land.

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