



**AN INSPIRING LEADER, A GREAT VISIONARY AND A HUMAN PAR EXCELLENCE –
RAJAGOPALACHARI (1878-1972)**

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ABSTRACT



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Rajagopalachari, who was also called as Rajaji, was an enigmatic personality with a philosopher’s mind and has made everlasting contributions in India. As a human being, Rajaji can be seen as playing multifaceted roles, both within the Government as well as in a political career spanning almost 60 years. He was: 1) a freedom fighter in the pre-independence days.2) an administrator while in government and 3) an advisor and commentator on political and economic matters as a citizen and 4) a strong and bitter political critic. This eminent Indian was acknowledged as “the wisest man of his time in the world” as he played a very prominent role in the struggle for freedom and strived much for India’s Independence. Another source of his prestige was the width of his learning and the height of his intellect. And his works depicts his dedication, integrity towards his country and fellowmen. As an author he was a brilliant and accomplished writer and has contributed much to the world of literature.

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INTRODUCTION

This researcher would exert on this great personality who is a renowned patriot, an unequalled statesman, a great social reformer, an able administrator, a popular writer, freedom fighter, an intimate associate of Mahatma Gandhi, one of the makers of modern India, a great leader of the Gandhian era and the founder of the Swatantra Party.

This researcher would shed some light on Rajaji’s background, he was an enigma, born in Thorapalli village of Salem District in a poor Tamil-speaking Iyengar family on 10th of December 1878. His father Chakravarti Venkatarya Iyengar hailed from Tamilnadu and mother Singaramma came from Kuppam in Chittoor, in Andhra Pradesh.

Rajaji’s Achievements

Rajaji himself had his schooling in Hosur and higher education in Central College of Bangalore of Karnataka and Law College, Madras. He was inspired by his friend Navaratna Rama Rao, who was junior to him, His friend’s brilliance and his deep knowledge in English literature fascinated him and his taste of classics got a new dimension. The two read a lot together and also ‘laughed and enjoyed humour and talked metaphysics and educated each other’. When he was studying in the Law College in Madras, an interesting incident happened. Swami Vivekananda visited Madras. He was put in the very hostel where Rajagopalachari was staying. He saw on the wall a picture of Lord Krishna. He asked, “Why Krishna is

“painted blue?” Rajagopalachari, still a student, answered: “Sir, the sea is limitless. So is the sky. And both are blue. God is also boundless. And so his hue is also blue”. Swami Vivekananda was overjoyed. He said the young boy would rise to eminence and would become very famous.

As a student, Rajaji developed great love for literature and later bloomed into a distinguished writer in Tamil and English. As was the custom, he had to marry early. His wife passed away after giving birth to three sons and two daughters. He started the legal practice at Salem after obtaining Law degree from Madras. His entry into politics coincided with zeal for social reforms. He became Chairman of Municipal Council of Salem and started a crusade against caste system, and the menace of alcohol. He faced opposition from ends, conservatives and the oppressed. But yet with his dedication, he was successful in introducing civic reforms.

Rajaji actively involved himself in almost all aspects of political and social life not as a mere observer or follower of events but one who tried and on many occasions succeeded in shaping the course of events. Even when he failed, he did not yield except when he was convinced he was wrong. He had a profound personality-which requires a full and deep study of his penetrating mind to comprehend his greatness. He would not meet anyone unnecessarily if the matter could be settled through correspondence. His queries were clear and his supplementary questions searching. Even before one entered his room, he would anticipate the purpose of his visit and without wasting a minute would straight away get the subject matter. To match him, one had to be equipped to anticipate his questions.

Rajaji played a crucial role in the building up of a free India. His decisions, his actions and his words were contributions from his rich experiences spanning almost 60 years. His political and personal life gives us glimpses of his hectic as well as awe inspiring personality. He had decorated various positions in governmental offices and his words had always been

considered with great regard. He was a patriotic in the true sense of the word; his unconditional dedication aimed the well being of all the fellow citizens disregard of religion, creed and caste. He was a versatile leader with a vision to gain not only political freedom but also economic and social freedom. He never intended on any personal gains. Though his political career was too hectic, he always found time for his passion of indulging in classics. He loved both English and Tamil languages and his literary contributions were elegant and splendid. Though he is well versed in using simple and clear words he could create a storm of patriotism in the mind of his readers with his strong and critical thoughts. 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 organizations 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.

His Radio talks, for example, on Taxation and Public Finance, when, as Chief Minister of Madras, he had to announce the issue of War Loan Bonds, are a model of clarity, brevity and scientific accuracy. The distinctive service he rendered was thus an intellectual service to the nation. He was a persistent fighter for causes in which he believed, but he was never less than himself.

In private life, he was gentle, kindly and full of pure affection. He could laugh himself and make others laugh by the wittiness of his talk. It is affection that earned him friends in many quarter.

Never would he refrain from saying or doing what he thought was correct because it might displease someone or it might be unpopular for those in power might become angry. When he went to Bombay in 1941, he had to face a black-flag demonstration against him. Some threw stones at him in the public meeting. But Rajaji did make his speech. In just a few

minutes, there was calmness around and the crowd listened to him.

He had unflinching faith in Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and principles. He got agitated at the arrest of Gandhiji for peacefully opposing a racial tax. He always followed his master's principles. But he was not a man to accept the ideas and views of others without examining them. When the question of dividing the country arose, every Congress leader opposed it. Still Rajaji supported the demand for Pakistan. He kept aloof from the 'Quit India' movement stated in 1942 to get the country's independence from the British. He was the only leader who did not take an active role in that movement. So he resigned from the Congress in 1942. Some accuse him of being the cause for the rise of Pakistan. He had to face the hostility of the people who thought that he supported the creation of Pakistan. It became difficult for him to speak in meetings. Quite a few leaders also criticized him harshly. But Rajaji faced not only harsh words but also stones, and justified opinion. At the time Rajaji started the Swatantra Party, the Congress Party and Jawaharlal Nehru had tremendous influence in the country. But Rajaji did build this opposition party. And till his last day, whenever he felt that either the ruling party or very popular leader like Nehru was making a mistake, he roundly condemned it.

Words are insufficient to pay tribute to Rajaji, who was an extraordinary genius. He was known for his sharp intellect. He could grasp any subject easily. He could pinpoint in a split-second the essence of any situation or problem. Because of such clear thinking and sharp understanding, his speech was also crisp, balanced, clear and to the point. As an administrator he displayed exquisite courage and a keen intelligence.

As Chief Minister of Madras, he had laid for himself a very high code of conduct; others would have found it impossible to follow it. He exercised great caution to see that he and his ministers remained untouched by corruption. He always went to the State Legislative

Assembly ready to answer any question or supplementary. He removed all controls on food grains. Several Ministers at the Centre and also others thought that Rajaji had taken a wrong and hasty step. But soon it was evident that what he did was right. So all over the country, the controls on food grains were removed.

Another specialty is his uniqueness, it projects out in as an important trait in Rajaji, is his service-mindedness. He had become quite rich while quite young. If he had continued as a lawyer and had not entered politics, he could have been very wealthy. He could have led a life of luxury. He gave up such a career for the sake of the country; He went to jail five times. He never wanted any position. He was one who is all brains and no brawn, steadfast in purpose and iron of will, who sets goals high, however big, the obstacle or great, the sacrifice. It is difficult for those of small mind and little knowledge to understand, much less to appreciate him. The unknowing may even think he has been suffering from the vice of virtue but the discerning will readily grant that it was all born of clear and close analysis, of ends and means.

He was an Everest among Himalayan peaks, not easy to approach or to conquer. He was unapproachable in more senses than one. Fire purifies but in the process gets us out of shape; ice solidifies but makes us inert and lifeless. If we did not see the warmth and the great quality which admitted of easy approach, the fault was of course with us, for we knew he was capable of great affection, sympathy and kindness, not to speak of wit and humour; but that was for the fortunate few.

The rest of us had perforce to be content with worship and admiration for that matter, all from a respectable distance, neither too far nor too near. He was a patriot and thinker of the first order; few, in India or abroad, had his vision and insight or could write with such precision, directness, simplicity or effect. If mere argument and reasoning could do the trick, fewer still could equal him.

Rajaji's intellect is par excellence than any other political figures of the time. He was respected and esteemed among his peers and colleagues. His mission only intended in the growth of the country, he was a strong opponent of atrocities against people in the name of religion. He was alert, vigilant, determined to set the highest standards in the management of the proceedings of the Legislature and to keep the discussions and the debates sharp and clear, yet not tinged with personal abuses, malicious slanders. He encouraged harmonious unity and harshly voiced out his views on the social evils of the time. Thus life had gifted him different and varies roles of a prominent politician, a prolific writer, a staunch rationalist, a true statesman and an uncompromising believer.

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