

P.S.KUMARASAMY RAJA –TRANSFORMING TAMILNADU’S GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

Tamilnadu had taken active participation in the pre-independence politics of the nation. The budding desire for independence had generated numerous volunteers in the state who sacrificed their lives in the service of the nation. Several political leaders of the state fought against the British rule in India and played a vital role in Tamil Nadu politics. India got her freedom in 1947 and Tamil Nadu got the separate status of a state in the Indian Union. Tamil Nadu politics was dominated by Indian National Congress after Independence. The Indian National Congress was the ruling party of Tamil Nadu for the first twenty years after independence, until a Dravidian party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam(DMK), swept the 1967 elections. After Independence Tamil Nadu, then known as Madras State, witnessed the leadership of five notable Chief Ministers viz., O.P.RamasamyReddiar, P.S.Kumarasamy Raja, C.Rajagopalachari, K.Kamaraj and Bhaktavatsalam who played pivotal roles in shaping the state's political landscape. This article aims to highlight the contributions of P.S.Kumarasamy Raja for the socio-economic development of Tamil Nadu and set precedents for governance and leadership that influenced subsequent administrations.

Keywords: Independence, British rule, Indian National Congress, Dravidian, Tamil Nadu Politics

Introduction

The Gandhian Satyagraha Movement in India has produced many illustrious leaders. They worked hard for the cause of country's liberation. The teachings of Gandhi were truly adopted by these dedicated leaders in their life period and worked together with conviction to attain Independence to the nation. P.S.Kumarasamy Raja of Rajapalayam stood foremost among the leaders in South India. He served as the last Chief Minister of Madras Presidency from 6 April 1949 to 26 January 1950 C.E. and first Chief Minister of Madras State from 26 January 1950 to 10 April 1952 C.E. and Governor of Orissa between 1954 to 1956 C.E.

Early Life

Kumaraswamy Raja was born on 8th July 1898 C.E. at Rajapalayam in the composite Ramanathapuram District of Madras Presidency. Raja belonged to the kshatriya Raju community, the ancestors of which migrated from the Northern Circars of East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh during the Vijayanagar rule. They established their settlement in this place between fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. His parents were Possapadi Sanjeevi Raja and Muthammal. Raja lost his mother when he was a baby of eight days and was brought up by his paternal grandmother. Raja was the only issue to the parents. His father Sanjeevi Raja died in 1901 C.E. During his childhood days, Raja was very active, cheerful, playful, and energetic and also a very affectionate boy to his grandmother.

Education

After completing his first form he was taken to Anglo Vernacular School where he finished his third form. His grandmother compelled the young Raja to marry her granddaughter Srirangammal. In 1912 C.E. the marriage of Raja was celebrated. For his school education he was taken to the Hindu High School, Srivilliputhur in 1913 C.E. and was there till March 1919 C.E. to write his S.S.L.C examination. During his study in Srivilliputhur, he covered the distance of eight miles on foot.

Early Career

Raja served as the President of Rajapalayam Union Panchayat Court, District Board of Ramanathapuram etc. In 1932 C.E. he got arrested for disobeying the laws. In 1934 C.E., he won Central Legislature for a constituency of Tirunelveli, Madurai and Ramanathapuram. In 1936 C.E. he became MLA during Rajaji's period. On April 1946 C.E., he was the minister of Agriculture and its related portfolios in T. Prakasam's ministry.

Role in Freedom Struggle

Raja became an ardent reader of newspapers and journals. After schooling, he was connected with Congress at its initial level. It was in 1915 C.E. the Home Rule League was started by Annie Besant in Madras, a branch of it was organized at Srivilliputhur. The writings of Besant and her speeches inspired the young Raja to take active part in the Movement. The British authorities issued many restrictions against the people joining the movement. Those stringent measures of British Government did not dampen the spirit of Raja. Having such a political consciousness, Raja involved with great enthusiasm in the Home Rule Movement. He arranged Home Rule meetings at Srivilliputhur and

Rajapalayam. B.P.Wadia, the prominent leader of the movement was invited to be the chief guest at this meetings. S.Sathyamurthi and C.Rajagopalachari, the leaders of South India visited Rajapalayam. The visits of these leaders gave a great impetus to Raja and his followers. The writings of Annie Besant and the speeches of S.Satyamurthi had a great influence on his mind and character. It was in March 1919 C.E that Raja first met Gandhiji and followed him with great interest. To quote his words, "the epic struggle in South Africa, the founding of the Ashram in Ahmedabad, the Champaran struggle, all these made a profound impression on me and the utter simplicity of Mahatma's life also evoked my unbounded admiration".

Raja's career from adulthood till his death was marked with hectic political activity. Raja involved himself in all fields of national interest. His work entitled, *'My Introduction As a Gandhian'* brought him fame. In his speeches he stressed the need for unity and a spirit of dedication to achieve freedom from the foreign yoke. He boldly condemned the atrocities committed by the British government, strongly protested against and criticized the Rowlatt Act and called upon the people of this region to observe Satyagraha. Raja had the unique honour of being the Vice – President of the Reception Committee of the first Khilafat Conference held in Madras in February 1920. When Gandhi's Non Co-operation Movement was in peak, Raja actively involved in the Satyagraha movement along with his political guru, I.B.Arrangasamy Raja, the founder of Congress Committee at Rajapalayam.

With the moral support of the people of this region, Raja started 'Peasants Association' and 'Harijan Sangh' in 1921 C.E. at the village level and became its organizing secretary. The efforts made by him for the removal of untouchability and for the promotion of Khaddar were remarkable in his political life. Raja involved not only in Congress activities but also in the Co- operative, Panchayat system and Local Board and District Board levels. In 1927 C.E. Raja started Gandhi Khaddar Vastralayam, a limited company at Rajapalayam and it was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. This institution later got merged with All India Sarka Sangh in 1929. Raja participated in the boycott programmes of Civil Disobedience movement such as toddy shop picketing, boycott of foreign cloth shops at Rajapalayam in 1931 C.E.

The year 1932 C.E. gave him the first opportunity to prove his mettle in selflessness and sacrifice for the country's cause. Disobeying the unjust laws imposed by the foreign

bureaucratic rule was the programme of the Congress. Raja obeyed implicitly the mandates of the Congress and the result was his conviction and imprisonment in the jail for one year. Prominent and popular as a public figure courting imprisonment moved many in and around Rajapalayam to follow him to court arrest and Rajapalayam of Ramanathapuram District gained a distinct place in the political map of India as one of the important centers fighting for the political freedom, so far as the South was concerned, it was among the foremost. For this the credit went largely to Raja's leadership. After his release, he resumed his activities, not only in the Congress but in several other related fields with which he was closely associated.

Involvement in Co-operative Society

Raja was one of the most prominent figures in the field of Co-operation and knew all the minute details of that field. He was associated with VillageCreditSociety, District Co-operative Union and District Central Bank, Provincial Co-operative Union, Provincial Co-operativeBank, Land MortgageBank and Provincial Co-operativeInsuranceSociety, serving in them in several capacities - as Member, Director, President etc. The Bhupathi Raja Co-operative Bank Ltd., Rajapalayam with its imposing building situated at the centre of Rajapalayam stands monumental to the great efforts and services of Raja to build an institution. He was its progenitor. Started in 1924 as a small credit society, it grew by leaps and bounds into the status, by the untiring efforts of Raja. This society was inaugurated by Dandu Narayana Raju of Central Andhra.

Role in Congress

In December 1938 C.E., Rajapalayam experienced a great event which was the high water mark in the surging flow of her patriotism. It was the Fortieth Tamil Nadu Provincial Political Conference conducted by Raja, who was the President of the Reception Committee. K.Kamaraj and R.Krishnaswamy Naidu were the Secretaries of that reception Committee. P.A.C.Ramaswamy Raja was its Treasurer. The conference was a magnificent affair. The arrangements and pageantry filled everyone with wonder and thrill. That session was almost like that of All India National Congress. Thousands of patriotic workers, who helped Raja in making that conference a unique success, were twined, as it were, by their twin love for Raja and love for country. The Premier C.Rajagopalachari and other Ministers of his cabinet attended the conference. It was presided over by O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiar.

The Second World War broke out in Europe in September, 1939 C.E. and the

British government in India launched its war efforts. But the Congress party's governments in the Provinces refused to co-operate with them. As a result the Provincial Cabinets and Legislature were dissolved. The governments were run by Councils of Bureaucratic Advisers. In Madras, C.Rajagopalachari's cabinet was resigned. Raja and other members of the council resigned their posts too.

In 1940 C.E the Congress embarked on its programme of "Individual Satyagraha". It permitted individual Congressmen to involve in Satyagraha against the British war efforts. Many responded to it throughout the country. Raja participated in it and in December 1940 C.E., he was sentenced to undergo imprisonment for nine months and pay a fine of Rs.300. He served his term in the Trichy Central Jail, and was released on its expiry. Thereupon he resumed his activities in the Local Boards administration, Co-operative Movement, etc.

In 1941 C.E., Raja was elected as the President of the South Ramanathapuram District Board. He was also much interested in the Scout Movement. He was the President of the "Hindustan Scout Association" with its headquarters at Adyar, Madras. After the Second World War, and with the removal of the Governmental curbs on the people's liberties, the Congress embarked again on its programme of the entry into the Legislature. There were general elections throughout the Country. Raja was elected unopposed to the Madras Legislative Assembly from Srivilliputhur Constituency in April, 1946 C.E. The Congress succeeded at the polls with its thumping majority of seats in the legislature. Its ministry was formed under the leadership of T.Prakasam as the Premier. He was the minister in-charge of agriculture, public works and co-operation.

On that score and certain others, differences arose between the Premier, T.Prakasam and Raja., Hence Raja resigned his Ministership in February, 1947 C.E. There was no smooth sailing between the Chief Minister and the other ministers also. The Congress Legislature Party elected O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiar as the leader in April, 1947 C.E. The result was that Prakasam's ministry resigned and the new ministry was formed with O.P.Ramasamy Reddiar as the new Premier of Madras Presidency.

The Indian Independence Day was celebrated on 15th August 1947 C.E by Raja at Rajapalayam on a grand scale and in a manner befitting the glorious contribution made by Rajapalayam to the fight for the country's freedom. Raja attended several sessions of

the Indian National Congress. Untiring and ceaseless were his efforts to implement the scheme of constructive work of Mahatma Gandhi. Prohibition, abolition of untouchability, promotion of Khadi and other cottage industries etc., were foremost among the items of the programme for the implementation of which Raja worked with consistency, tenacity and sincerity.

Raja as Chief Minister

It was in March 1949 C.E., O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiar's leadership lost its hold over the Congress Legislature Party. There was a triangular fight for leadership, which ultimately became a duel fight, the contesting candidates for leadership being O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiar and P.Subbarayan. However, the position was not rosy. There came a stage when Raja was persuaded by O.P.Ramaswamy Reddiar himself to accept it. And in the party meeting, Raja was elected the leader by a great majority.

In April 1949 C.E., Raja formed his cabinet. The most outstanding among the reforms effected by the Madras Government in Raja's regime, was the introduction of the scheme of Separation of the Judiciary from the Executive, separate department of Harijan welfare, total prohibition etc. In respect of these reforms in the Country, Raja was the torch bearer and the other provinces also followed Madras. In all the years of his life, Raja spent much of his wealth for helping one and all and especially the poor. But any little thing not granted during his regime as the Chief Minister, stayed as a sore in the avaricious eyes of the party people.

Resignation and After math

In the general elections in January, 1952 C.E., Raja was defeated by 118 votes. It did not cast even a ripple of perturbed feeling in him. He was as jovial on the day of his election – defeat as he was ever before. At midnight on 12th January 1952 C.E. the telephone news of his defeat was conveyed by the Election Commissioner, woke him up from his sleep. He heard it and went to bed at once. Then next morning, a crowd of press reporters came to him and Raja greeted them all with his usual smile and laughter a feature, which they perhaps never anticipated. They asked him of his defeat; and Raja's jovial reply was "I am not wanted by my constituency; and what else could be there as on". Raja laid down the charge as the Chief Minister on 10th April and his successor, C.Rajagopalachari took charge as the

Chief Minister of Madras.

Raja's long standing desire for promoting culture and fine arts was in embryo. Now, his freedom from active politics, gave it a rapid growth. He had the desire to donate the house to the public, for starting an institution of culture called "Gandhi Kalai Mandram" for housing a huge public library and also an organization for promoting culture and fine arts, including music, dance, drama etc. He got a smaller house newly built for his residence in the Co-operative Building Society Colony at Rajapalayam, and donated his old residential house for Gandhi Kalai Mandram on which he began to concentrate all his attention and energy.

Of course Raja had not sufficient means to provide for the running of that institution. He planned to raise funds by donations from the public. It was indeed a hard task. How many would come to him now, when he was no longer in the sunshine of his life – life of power and position?

However, he pursued his benevolent scheme of making Gandhi Kalai Mandram, as his brainchild, a living organisation; and his desire was that the said ancestral family residence of his which was signified by the visits of Mahatma Gandhi (in 1927 and in 1934), Babu Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Satyamurthi, Rajaji and many other illustrious leaders of India should be utilized for the sacred cause of promoting knowledge, education and culture. He got a marble tablet laid in that house, indicating the visits of those great men to it, and it was done in a public function presided over by Alagappa Chettiar, when O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar opened it.

In short, Raja's life was one of noble activity, dedication and selfless service for the people of the country and his home town Rajapalayam became a great industrial centre mainly due to his drive and interest.

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