

# POLITICAL CAREER OF C. RAJAGOPALACHARI

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## ABSTRACT

C.Rajagopalachari popularly known as Rajaji, the first and only Indian to be the Governor - General of India was an ardent patriot a pioneering social reformer, incisive thinker, profound scholar, and author. Rajaji's merits and traits elevated him to hold and highest posts such as Governor-General in free India, Governor of Bengal, Premier of Madras Presidency and Chief Minister of Madras state. He participated in the Freedom struggle and faithfully carried out all the programmes of Gandhiji and the Congress. The fire of Swadesi movement, started in Bengal, soon spread to TamilNadu under the leadership of Rajaji. The Rowlatt Satyagraha as a political campaign was a failure as it did not attain its objective of the repeal of the Rowlatt Act. Processions from many areas of the city converged in the Marina beach. In the evening a mammoth public meeting was addressed by C.Rajagopalachari, Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar, S.Sathyamurthy and George Joseph. The Non-co-operation movement gained momentum in Tamil Nadu under the dynamic leadership of C.Rajagopalachari. C. Rajagopalachari earned the esteem of the Muslims by his active involvement in the agitation. In the provincial congress conference moved a resolution demanding the release of Ali brothers who had courted arrest for spear-heading the Khilafat movement. The birth of the Justice Party constitutes a landmark in the history of South India. The Vedaranyam March or Vedaranyam Satyagraha was organised to protest the salt tax imposed by the British Raj in India. Rajaji was a true and dedicated disciple of Gandhi and did not hesitate to voice his dissent when he felt strongly about any particular matter. Rajaji was the Chief Minister during the year from 1952 -1954 in Madras State. Rajaji's relations with leaders like Gandhiji, Nehru, Kamaraj, Satyamurthy, E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu and others with whom he crossed swords for political reasons were extremely cordial on the personal front.

**Key words:** C.Rajagopalachari - ardent patriot - Madras Presidency - Chief Minister - Governor-General - Swadesi movement - Non-Cooperation Movement - Rowlett Satyagraha - Jallianwala Bagh Massacre - Khilafat movement - Justice Party - Vedaranyam March - Quit India movement -

## **Introduction:**

C.Rajagopalachari popularly known as Rajaji, the first and only Indian to be the Governor - General of India was an ardent patriot a pioneering social reformer, incisive thinker, profound scholar, and author. Rajaji was also an eminent statesman and able administrator. Rajaji graced his office with simplicity, dignity and elegance. His intellect was sharper and more balanced than most of his formidable contemporaries. Rajaji's high mental caliber marked him out as an unusual politician. Rajaji's writings in lucid style, his devout individuality, his steadfast faith in God, and his approach to life and work, reveal his uniqueness. Rajaji was a person of the highest integrity and self-sacrifice. Shortly speaking, Rajaji was an asset to India. Rajaji's key-roles in Indian politics are something unforgettable and praiseworthy. Rajaji's merits and traits elevated him to hold and highest posts such as Governor-General in free India, Governor of Bengal, Premier of Madras Presidency and Chief Minister of Madras state.

### Rajaji and Swadesi Movement:

The Swadesi movement, part of the Indian independence movement and the developing Indian nationalism, was an economic strategy aimed at removing the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India by following the principles of Swadesi, which had some success. Subramania Bharathi's patriotic songs fanned the fire of Swadesi nationalism and his articles in 'India' demonstrated that the Swadesi Movement had struck deep roots in Tamil Nadu. It was mainly introduced by Gandhiji and the strategies of the Swadesi movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic products and production processes. The Balabharath Association arranged popular discussion and debate in support of the mass movement. The fire of Swadesi movement, started in Bengal, soon spread to TamilNadu under the leadership of Rajaji.

### Rajaji and Rowlatt Satyagraha:

The Rowlatt Satyagraha as a political campaign was a failure as it did not attain its objective of the repeal of the Rowlatt Act. On 17<sup>th</sup> March 1919, Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu and stayed at the residence of Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar to device the way to oppose the draconian Bills. The Rowlatt Satyagraha had its genesis in Tamil Nadu. Even when the Rowlatt Bills were discussed in the Central Legislature V. Srinivasachari warned that there would be an upheaval in India if the Black Bills were to be enacted into law. On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1919 anti - Rowlatt Day was observed in Tamil Nadu Protest demonstrations were held at several parts of the presidency. Processions from many areas of the city converged in the Marina beach. In the evening a mammoth public meeting was addressed by C.Rajagopalachari, Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar, S.Sathyamurthy and George Joseph.

### Rajaji and Non co-operation Movement:

The Non-Cooperation Movement was a significant phase of the Indian independence movement from British rule. It was led by Mahatma Gandhi after the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. Gandhiji launched the Non Co-operation movement on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1920 and it was a significant episode in the history of the Indian National movement. The ideas of Ahimsa and nonviolence, and Gandhi's ability to rally hundreds of thousands of common citizens towards the cause of Indian independence, were first seen on a large scale in this movement through the summer 1920, they feared that the movement might lead to popular violence. It aimed to resist British rule in India through nonviolent means. The Government of India Act 1919 and Rajaji's Reaction at the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1920, the boycott of the council was included in the Non-Cooperation movement. The Non-co-operation movement gained momentum in Tamil Nadu under the dynamic leadership of C.Rajagopalachari. In the Madras presidency, Rajaji was one of the first men to respond to Gandhi's call to give up his lucrative practice of law. Protestors would refuse to buy British goods, adopt the use of local handicrafts and picket liquor shops. It turned to be a mass movement. People of Tamil Nadu hoisted National flag, installed photos of national leaders, organized meetings, demonstrations and hartals. Several leaders like Madurai advocate George Joseph, S. SrinivasaIyengar, N.S. Varadachari, S.Ramanathan and V.O. Chidambaram renounced their titles or resigned their posts and joined the Movement. Rajaji's contribution as a fervent nationalist and champion of freedom made him one of the foremost leaders, who gave shape and direction to the Non Co-operation movement in Tamil Nadu. When the Non Co-operation movement stirred up the whole country, Rajaji and many others resigned their profession. It created an unparalleled scene of fervour, devotion and sacrifice. Rajaji and others accepted the non-co-operation programmes of boycotting the elections, courts of law, educational institutions, resignation from the governmental positions and the surrender of official titles and honours. Rajaji toured many parts of the Madras Presidency and he was responsible in piloting 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".

### Rajaji and Khilafat Movement:

The Khilafat movement was an agitation by Indian Muslims, allied with Indian nationalists, to pressure the British government to preserve the authority of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph of Islam after World War I. Tamil Nadu did not lag behind in extending its enthusiastic support to the Khilafat agitation. C. Rajagopalachari earned the esteem of the Muslims by his active involvement in the agitation. In the provincial congress conference moved a resolution demanding the release of Ali brothers who had courted arrest for spear- heading

the Khilafat movement. He also mobilized the support of the Hindus to observe the Khilafat day on 17th October, 1919. Khilafat committees were formed throughout Tamil Nadu. On 20<sup>th</sup> April 1920, Khilafat conference was held at Madras under the presidentship of Maulana Chaukat Ali.C.Rajagopalachari, Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar and T. Prakasam addressed the well attended Conference. Another such Conference was held at Erode which was presided over by Ali brothers. Gandhi toured Tamil Nadu in August 1920 seeking support to the Khilafat movement. Vaniyambadi served as the nerve-centre of the agitation. Khilafat agitation was a conspicuous success though the Justice party and the Liberal party had not supported it.

### **Rajaji and Justice Party:**

The Justice Party, officially the South Indian Liberal Federation, was a political party in the Madras Presidency of British India. It was established in 1916 by T. M. Nair and P. Thiagaraya Chetti as a result of a series of non-Brahmin conferences and meetings in Madras Presidency. The Justice Party opened a new era in the annals of the administration of Madras Presidency by capturing 81 out of 127 seats in the legislature. Its first ministry under the leadership of A.Subbarayalu Reddiyar assumed office on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1920. The differences between the moderates and the extremists regarding council entry developed. At that time Rajaji brought a resolution that was eventually accepted by all. The birth of the Justice Party constitutes a landmark in the history of South India. The long-smouldering discontent, hatred and suspicion of the elite non-Brahmins of the Madras Presidency towards Brahmins got institutionalized under the nomenclature of the S.I.L.F. whose primary purpose was "to promote the political interest of the non-Brahmin caste Hindus". The leaders of the Justice Party were "all men of substance and standing, highly educated, and conscious of the direction and goal of their endeavours". They were not mere idealists, but practical politicians. They accepted dyarchy with a view to employing the available power of the government for the upliftment of the non- Brahmin communities.

### **Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha**

The Vedaranyam March or Vedaranyam Satyagraha was organised to protest the salt tax imposed by the British Raj in India. C. Rajagopalachari, the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, was nominated by the Congress High Command to lead the Salt Satyagraha in the Presidency. He shifted the Congress Head Quarters from Madras to Trichy, which served as the center of Civil Disobedience movement. He went to Madurai to seek the support of N.M.R. Subbaraman, President of Madurai District Congress Committee and A. VaidyanathaIyer, local leading lawyer. At the residence of Iyer the final decision was taken to stage the Trichy Vedaranyam Salt March similar to that of Dandi March. The march was led by a group of 100 volunteers from the Indian National Congress under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari. It began at Tiruchirappalli and ended in Vedaranyam, a small coastal town in Tanjore District. The Indian Freedom movement is replete with a number of nationalistic episodes and exhibited the patriotism, unity, courage and sacrifice of the Indian people. Amidst British suppression, thousands and thousands of people took part in the movement for the Indian freedom. Many sacrificed their lives, a lot bore unbearable torture and oppression and innumerable spent their lives behind the prison bars. Gandhi, the massive leader of the nation commenced the Salt *Satyagraha* March on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930 at Dandi beach from the Sabarmathi Ashram. Rajaji's famous Vedaranyam Salt *Satyagraha* March was similar to Gandhi's Dandi March which had a strong impact on Madras Presidency. The Salt *Satyagraha* movement was launched in Tamil Nadu in 1930.

### **Rajaji and Quit India Movement**

The Quit India movement was a civil disobedience movement launched at the Bombay session of the All-India Congress Committee or more simply by Gandhi on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1942, during World War II, demanding an end to British Rule of India. Rajaji was a true and dedicated disciple of Gandhi and did not hesitate to voice his dissent when he felt strongly about any particular matter. The Cripps Mission had failed, and on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1942, Gandhi made a call to Do or Die in his Quit India speech delivered in Mumbai. The All-India Congress Committee launched a mass protest demanding what Gandhi called "An Orderly British Withdrawal" from India. Even though it was war time, the British were prepared to act. Almost the entire leadership of the INC was imprisoned without trial within hours of Gandhi's speech.

### Rajaji as the Chief Minister of Madras Presidency:

At the same time Sri Prakasa, the Governor of Madras having distrusted the communist lead coalition, took up courage and acted firmly. The month of March he invited Rajaji to form the Government. For a man who had held the highest office of Governor General of India, the Chief Ministership of a state was a very small position, viewed from the angle of his position. But to Rajaji the service of the people mattered more than the burden of office once again. At that time, Rajaji was not an elected member of the Assembly, but the Governor nominated him to the Legislative Council, the upper house of Madras Presidency. Not only that, he also came forward to strengthen the position of the Congress Ministry. For that purpose he even co-operated with Rajaji and persuaded Manickavelu Naicker, the leader of the Common Weal Party, to support the Congress Party. Accordingly Manickavelu Naicker agreed to join the Congress Party and become a minister in the Rajaji's ministry. He was given the portfolio of Land Revenue and Commercial Taxes. N.G.Ranga, the leader of Krishik Lok Party welcomed the election of Rajaji as leader of the Congress Legislative Party and promised support to the formation of a ministry by the Congress. Many of the DMK supported MLA'S also extended their support to the Rajaji's ministry.

### Rajaji's Second Ministry:

The Congress won under the leadership of Rajaji in the first general election which was held in 1952. Rajaji was the Chief Minister during the year from 1952 -1954 in Madras State. Rajaji instructed the members of the Legislature that they should go to their respective constituencies and work, and should not interfere in the administration by the Secretariat, and that if they encountered any difficulty, they could ventilate it by putting questions on the floor of the Legislature. He lifted the ration system without prior notice to the merchants. This measure immediately brought down the price of rice from four and a half rupees per measure to a rupee and a half. It showed practical results by his action. When the State police struck work in 1952, Rajaji immediately summoned the Army, recovered the weapons from those members of the Police force who had struck work, cancelled the recognition which had been accorded to the police union, severely punished the persons who were mainly responsible for the strike, consequently made the strikers rejoin duty and restored the tone of the police administration. In 1953, he suggested that every class should pursue its traditional occupation and study in the particular branch suitable to them. However, this idea could not find favour either from the opposition party members or from his own Congress men. He openly said in the Assembly "Communist Party is Public Enemy Number One and I am your enemy". He also put that party down and strengthened the Congress Party and restored democracy.

### Rajaji and other Leaders:

Rajaji's relations with leaders like Gandhiji, Nehru, Kamaraj, Satyamurthy, E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker in Tamil Nadu and others with whom he crossed swords for political reasons were extremely cordial on the personal front. Rajaji was a great patriot, an unequalled statesman, a great social reformer, an able administrator, a popular writer, freedom fighter, an intimate associate of Mahatma Gandhi Even from his student days, Rajaji was interested in politics. During those days he had the good fortune of being guided by great men like Chidambaram Pillai and Subrahmanyam Bharati. He came under the influence of leaders who were trying to awaken the Indian people from slavery. Annie Besant, Bala Gangadhara Tilak and others began to appreciate Rajaji. That Rajaji entered the political arena was not surprising. The historian Rajmohan Gandhi once identified a quintet of Indian nationalists as forming "the core of Gandhi's political team". Those were Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad, Rajendra Prasad, and C. Rajagopalachari. They each found their individual path to the Mahatma.

### Conclusion:

Rajaji was one of the rare personalities who have inscribed their names in many chapters of history at one and the same time. In the field of political affairs, Rajaji played a great, significant and pivotal role in the historic movements for the achievement of the Independence of India. He was a man of deep conviction and his advocacy of what he considered at the time to be the right course. He participated in the Freedom struggle and faithfully carried out all the programmes of Gandhiji and the Congress. When the Congress assumed office in

1937 and after Independence, he again became the Chief Minister in 1952. So, he had a good opportunity to implement his policy of social reforms. Rajaji's achievements in the field of social reforms especially in the sphere of the Harijan uplift, made him to be called radical, yet he was a wise conservative who could build a new structure without disturbing the foundations of the old culture. His elevation to the highest office Governor General of Free India was a tribute paid to his ability and integrity as well as to his sacrifice and service to India.

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