

P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja (1898 – 1957), A Forgotten Patriot of Virudhunagar District

Dr.SAI, Assistant Professor, PG and Research Centre in History, Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College (Autonomous), Sattur – 626 203, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India. & **Dr.ECCLESTON(MKU21PFOA10264)**, Ph.D., Research Scholar (Part Time), PG and Research Centre in History, Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College (Autonomous), Sattur – 626 203, Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

P.S. Kumarasamy Raja was born in 1898 in Rajapalayam. When he was a child his parents passed away and he was brought up by his grandmother. He studied FORM – III in an Anglo-Vernacular School. He joined high school at Srivilliputtur in 1913. He became an ardent reader of newspapers and journals. He stopped his studies in 1919. He was connected with Congress at its initial level. He was the President of Rajapalayam Union, Panchayat Court, District Board of Ramanathapuram, etc. In 1932, he got arrested for disobeying the laws. In 1934, he won central legislature for a constituency consisting of Tirunelveli, Madurai, and Ramanathapuram. In 1936, he became MLA during Rajaji's period. He spent most of his wealth to help the poor and for a public cause. In April 1946, in T. Prakasam's Ministry, he was the minister in charge of Agriculture and its related portfolios. In April 1949, he became the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency and he was in office till 1952. In 1954, he became the Governor of Orissa. He passed away on 16 March 1957.

Key words: *Madras Presidency, Ramnad, Srivilliputtur, Panchayat Court, Governor of Orissa, Gandhi Kalai Manram, etc.,*

Introduction

The Gandhian Satyagraha Movement in India has produced many illustrious leaders. They worked hard for the cause of Mother's liberation. The teachings of Gandhi was truly adopted by these dedicated Leaders in their life time and worked together with conviction to attain Independence to the nation. P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja of Rajapalayam of Virudhunagar District stood foremost among the leaders in South India.

P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja of Rajapalayam was the last Premier of Madras Presidency and the first Chief Minister of Tamilnadu as per the Republican constitution of 1950. After the attainment of independence by our country O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar who was already functioning as the premier of Madras Presidency from April 1947 continued to be in the post till April, 1949. He was succeeded by P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja.

During his period India became a sovereign Democratic Republic on 26 January 1950. His period also witnessed the passing of the Amendment Sarda Act in 1949 raising the marriageable age of girls from 14 to 15 and starting of excavation work at Arikamedu, near Puducherry. His period witnessed alarming situation of food shortage and relentless inner party

fighting in the congress Party. He introduced several outstanding reforms in Tamilnadu. He ruled upto 1952.

Early Life

P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja was born on 8 July 1898 at Rajapalayam in Virudhunagar district, then the composite Ramnad District of Madras Presidency. He belonged to the Kshatriya Raju community. His ancestors were migrated from the Norther circars of Andhra Pradesh during Vijayanagar rule in Tamilnadu. They established their settlement at present Rajapalayam between 15th and 16th centuries. His parents were Possapadi Sanjeevi Raja and Muthammal. He had his school education at Hindu High School, Srivilliputhur. During his young days Ramaswamy Raja was very active, cheerful, playful, energetic and affectionate boy.

Political career and involvement in Freedom struggle

Kumaraswamy Raja's career from adulthood till his death was marked with hectic political activity. When Home Rule League was started by Annie Besant, he took active part in the movement. He arranged Home Rule meetings at Srivilliputhur and Rajapalayam. Several prominent leaders of south India visited Rajapalayam. B.P.Wadia, the prominent leader of the movement was invited to be the chief guest at these 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 speeches of Sathyamurthi had a great fluence on the mind and character of Ramaswamy Raja. It was in March 1919 that Kumaraswamy Raja met Gandhiji and followed his principles with great interest.

In his speeches Ramaswamy Raja stressed the need for unity and a spirit of dedication to achieve freedom from foreign yoke. He boldly condemned the atrocities committed by the British government, strongly protested against and criticised the Rowlatt Act and called upon the people of this region to observe Satyagraha. The efforts made by him for the removal of untouchability and for the promotion of Khaddar were remarkable in his political life. When Gandhi's Non Co-operation Movement was in peak Raja actively involved in the Satyagraha movement along with his 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 Sing' in 1921 at the village level and became its organising secretary. The efforts made by him for the removal of untouchability and for the promotion of Khaddar were remarkable in his political life. Kumaraswamy Raja participated in the civil Disobedience Movement and involved in toddy shop picketing, boycott of foreign cloth shops at Rajapalayam in 1931. For disobeying the unjust law of the alien rule, he was arrested and sentenced imprisonment for one year. Thus Rajapalayam gained a distinct place in the political map of India as one of the important centres of fighting for political freedom. After his release, he resumed his activities, not only in the Congress but in several other related fields with which he was closely associated.

In 1934 Kumaraswamy Raja elected to central legislative council as a congress candidate. In the same year he got elected as a member of Madras Legislative council. In Madras the congress Legislative party with its thumping majority of members formed the ministry under the leadership of Rajaji. In 1938 Kumaraswamy Raja convened the 40th Tamilnadu Provincial Political conference at Rajapalayam. It was attended by prominent congress leaders like Kamaraj, Rajaji, Krishnasamy Naidu and O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar. This conference was a grand success because of the support of the thousands of patriotic workers. In 1939 when the Rajaji ministry resigned, Kumaraswamy Raja and other members of the council also resigned their post.

In 1940 Kumaraswamy Raja participated in the individual Satyagraha. He was arrested and sentenced to undergo imprisonment for nine months and pay a fine of three hundred rupees. He served his term in Trichy central Jail. In 1941 he was elected as the President of South Ramanathapuram District Board. When the general elections was held in April 1946, he was elected unopposed to Madras Legislative Assembly from Srivilliputhur constituency. When the ministry was formed under the leadership of T. Prakasam as Premier, Kumaraswamy Raja assumed the post of Minister in charge Agriculture, Public works and co-operation. But he resigned his ministership in February 1947 due to the difference of opinion with T.Prakasam. When the Prakasam ministry resigned in April 1947, O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar became the new Premier of Madras Presidency.

Kumaraswamy Raja as Premier of Tamilnadu

It was in March 1949, O.P. Ramasamy Reddiar's leadership lost its hold over the congress Legislature party. So he announced his retirement. Immediately power struggle for Premiership restarted. There was a duel fight between Bakthavatchalam, supported by Kamaraj group and Dr. Subbarayan of Rajaji group. As a compromise Kumarasamy Raja was persuaded by Kamaraj and O.P. Ramasamy to accept the leadership. In the congress Legislature party meeting Kumaraswamy Raja was elected the leader by a great majority. Soon he was invited by the Governor to form the ministry. In April 1949 Kumaraswamy Raja assumed the Premiership of Tamilnadu and formed his cabinet.

In his address to the public after assuming the charge of the government assured the people, that his government would continue the same principles of the former ministry of O.P. Ramasamy. But the groupism among the congress legislative members undermined the administration of Kumaraswamy Raja. They gave constant trouble to him. The most outstanding among the reforms effected by Kumaraswamy Raja was the introduction of the scheme of Separation of Judiciary from the executive, separate department for Harijan welfare and total prohibition. In respect of these reforms he was the torch bearer and other provinces followed Madras.

The food situation in the Madras Presidency reached an alarming situation. Food problem was the legacy of the British rule in India. It continued till the introduction of Five year plan. Due to bad harvest it posed a serious threat. Rice was not distributed properly. Black marketing

and hoarding was rampant all over the state. The government resorted to impose restriction on parties. The number was restricted to fifty persons only to a feast. This led to displeasure of the public. In the villages the situation was worse. The ration system was not properly implemented. In Ramnad, Tirunelveli, Madurai and Kanyakumari areas only three days ration was given with which people had to satisfy their seven days requirement. The food crisis was followed by cloth shortage. It was because of the ill conceived policy of the centre. The mill owners were permitted to sell one third of the production as they like. They exported their quota. There were long queues in cloth shops for the purchase of mill cloth. The food scarcity along with cloth shortage affected the government.

In order to improve the condition of the depressed classes a separate department called Harijan welfare department was established. Provision of house sites, building of schools, granting of scholarship, provision of road and street lights and assignment of land for cultivation were undertaken. For Women welfare special attention was paid for maternity and child welfare. Employment opportunities for women increased by creating new posts. An industrial training centre for women was opened. In 1950 a scheme for giving training in knitting and needle work to 'Thoda women' of Nilgiris was drafted.

The government formulated two policies, the rural housing scheme and urban housing scheme. The rural housing scheme was introduced in 1950-51. The government allotted fifty lakhs of rupees for the grant of loan to each. The 'Government Financial Rural Housing Society' was established in each district. The Firkha development scheme which was started in 1946 extended to fifty more Firkhas in 1950. Under this scheme a number of wells were dug and roads were constructed. The farmers were supplied with seeds, manure better agriculture implements etc. In 1952 rural welfare scheme was implemented in 84 selected Firkhas.

During the period of Kumaraswamy Raja special scheme was formulated for the development of education. A number of secondary schools for girls were opened. The importance of women education was realised by the Government. During the year 1951-52 ten new colleges were opened. Technical education was also received importance. Industrial training centre for women was started in Madras in July 1950. Under the rural welfare work several elementary schools and educational training schools were started.

Rural colleges were started in Tanjavur, Kallikottai, and Waltair in 1950. The Victory memorial school for the blind at Poonamallee in Madras was taken over by the government in 1950. It came to be known as 'The government school for blind at Poonamallee'. Adult education was given encouragement. By 1950, 846 Adult literacy centres were opened. The government encouraged private managements to start hostels for Harijan students. Schools for Kallar children were also opened.

To encourage cotton industries a number of schemes were drafted. The government in order to encourage cottage industries introduced schemes for the development Khadhi in selected Firkhas. A scheme known as M. Viswashwariah scheme was drafted for the development of

cottage industries. For rural welfare the government sanctioned 'Village industry' scheme in 1952. Industrial training schools and Polytechnics were started to overcome the financial difficulties for the private industries. Much importance was given to opening of sugarcane and vanaspathi industries. The Bureau of commercial intelligence and statistics was also of great help to industries. It gave financial aid to sugar, textile, cement, chemicals, fertilizer, soap and gas factories etc. It also helped the industries to get raw materials which were difficult to get and also in exporting finished and semi finished products in foreign markets.

Conclusion

The Madras Assembly election was held in January 1952 under the new Constitution of 1950. The congress party lost its majority. Most of the ministers including the chief minister Kumaraswamy Raja faced an electoral defeat. The congress party was able to form the ministry only with the help of the independent members. Kumaraswamy Raja laid down the charge as the chief minister on 10 April 1952 and his successor Rajaji took charge as chief minister of Madras. After his electoral defeat Kumarasamy Raja freed himself from active politics and engaged in promoting culture and fine arts. He started the institution of culture called, 'Gandhi Kalai Manram' in Rajapalayam. He donated his old residential house for this organisation on which he began to concentrate all his attention and energy. He was appointed as the Governor of Orissa in April 1954.

In his last days he suffered a lot from diabetes and his health was failing gradually and more rapidly in later days. The stress and strain of work in Orissa coupled with the restricted mode of life led in the constitutional cage of Governorship, proved hard to him. So he requested the President of India to relieve him from the post of Governorship. He handed over the charge of Governorship on 12 September 1956 to his successor. After that he toured to several places including his ancestral Poospadu village in Andhra Pradesh. Due to heart attack Kumaraswamy Raja passed away on 15 March 1957.

Books, Notes and References

1. V.Venkat Raman, *Deshabhimani P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, 1898 -1957*, Rajapalayam, 1998.
2. P.S. Kumaraswamy Raja, *Ennathu Illama Ninaivukal*, Rajapalayam, 1955.
3. Diary of PS Kumaraswamy Raja, Dated: 17 March 1919
4. P.S Kumaraswamy Raja, *My Introduction As a Gandhian*, Madras, 1951.
5. A.K.D Venkata Raju, *A Brief Life Sketch of PS.Kumaraswamy Raja*, Rajapalayam, 1964.
6. An Extract from the *Report of 40th Tamilnadu Provincial Political Conference*, Rajasthan, 1938.
7. V.Venkat Raman, *Selected Speeches of P.S.Kumarasamy Raja, 1931-1956* Rajapalayam, 1999.
8. *Dinamani*, 16 August 1947.
9. *Dinamani*, 11 April 1949

10. *The Hindu*, 11 April 1949.
11. *The Hindu*, 13 January 1952.
12. *Dinamani*, 14 January 1952.
13. *The Hindu*, 11 April 1952.
14. Report from the Minutes Book of Gandhi Kalai Mantram, Rajapalayam.
15. *Dinamani*, 17 November, 1955.
16. *Dinamani*, 16 March 1957.
17. *The Hindu*, 16 March 1957.
18. <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/unsung-heroes-detail.htm?3533>.