

## **Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari – A Man of Letters**

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Rajaji 1878-1972

Courtesy: <http://tamilnation.co/forum/forum%2007.htm>

### **Abstract**

The world of literary studies expands with the elaborate literary canon by means of the endless vision and incessant flow of thoughts cherished by the wizards of intellect. The literary phenomenon obtains the richest returns of wisdom born out of the meditative energy in the creative genius. In this manner, the contribution of literature to mankind is tremendous, having an eternal bearing on the various stages of human life. Literature of every country partakes in the promotion of morality of life and in the elevation of social integration. Indian English Literature too occupies a distinct position through its attributes for the sublimity of thee social purpose. Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari (1878-1972) was affectionately known as Rajaji or 'C.R.' He was a multi-faceted personality. He was a freedom fighter, good speaker, writer, humorist and a humanist. Strongly self-reliant, he had the courage of his convictions and for nearly six decades one of the leading political leaders of the Indian political scenario. After Independence, he succeeded Lord

Mountbatten as the Governor General of India. A great representative of the 20<sup>th</sup> century India, Rajaji with his humanistic fervor enthralls the world of Indian literary creation. Rajaji's speeches and writings achieve the stature of immortality for they connote much for the elevation, both the terrestrial and celestial to be characterized in the life of mankind.

### **Focus of This Paper**

Humanity is a philosophy that asserts dignity and worth to man and helps him to establish his capacity for self-realization through reason. Literature is a vital expression of man's social concern in its multiple forms. Humanism is a spiritual exercise. It has to be practiced by the masses of the world, during this modern era of chaos and peril. Rajaji's speeches and writings with their redemptive principles inescapably recommend this delightful feeling to be adopted by mankind for his serene and peaceful state of existence on the earth. His sole intention was to gospel the ideas of love, brotherhood and hard work for the welfare of humanity. The resounding voice of Rajaji reproving the wrongs of several spheres of the society is heard everywhere in his prose utterances. His speeches and writings can be acclaimed to be the chastising rod in the path of reconstructing the universe, devoid of violence and animosity. In this paper, it is proposed to show his merits as a man of letters.

### **Played Various Roles**

Rajaji played varied roles during his lifetime. He was 94 when he died and till his last moments he was mentally alert though his frail physique showed signs of fatigue at times. He had great honours bestowed on him including the Bharat Ratna in 1954 and also faced stiff opposition from many quarters for his ideas and advice, political as well as social. However, he was undaunted. Prosperity and adversity were same to him. All his actions, speeches and writings during the pre and post independent India reveal him as one who drew his teaching from the *Bhagavad Gita* and the ethos from the sacred texts

### **Indo Anglican Writer**

Many know Rajaji as a freedom fighter, social worker, Harijan supporter and great lawyer from Salem, Tamilnadu, the only Indian Governor General of Independent India and the Governor

of West Bengal, but only a few know him as a great writer, that too an Indo Anglican writer. Rajaji himself once denied that he was a writer. It may be his natural humility that made him reject the idea. But there is sufficient evidence to show that he was not only a talented speaker, but also gifted writer in English as well as in his mother tongue Tamil. Even during his tenure in Salem, his briefs and speeches gave credence to his mastery of English.

When this Gandhian activist came out from the Congress party, he began contributing articles on day-to-day problems the country was facing to journals like *The Swarajaya*. Thus, he is also remembered as a fearless journalist.

### **Started as a Lawyer**

Rajaji started his career as a lawyer at Salem Bar Council, and his success there to some extent was due to his proficiency in English. He acquired mastery of the language from the Scottish Professor of English at Central College, Bangalore. Another great personality by name Navaratna Rama Rao, was his classmate during his undergraduate days. Both remained good friends throughout their lives and Rajaji showed great warmth and affection to his trusted friend and collaborator in his writings. The judges at Salem District Court held C.R. in high esteem and valued his arguments. His keen intellect, simple and logical cross examination appealed to the minds of the common people and the judges. There was a widespread belief then that whatever cases C.R. attended were sure to succeed. He had good wit. But he was never acrimonious. He was a model advocate, and the success there was a stepping stone to enter the wider scene of the freedom movement slowly gaining ground with Gandhiji's return from South Africa.

### **Speeches of Rajaji**

Some of the speeches and writings of C.R are of lasting value. On various occasions, he had left his impressions in his own characteristic style. Some examples are given below.

Soon after he became the CM of Madras Presidency State, he received an Honorary Doctorate and an official letter from his office reached him with the appellation –Dr. and C.R's reaction was "It is not the custom to use the appellation Doctor or its abbreviation Dr. When the

doctorate is conferred honoris and not earned in the regular way....” C.R too received many honorary doctorates, but never used them before his name.

### **Some Interesting Episodes**

He wrote in *Swarajya* about his wish for the change of mind of Indira Gandhi during emergency “I have said harsh things about how Smt. Indira Gandhi has come to hold dictatorial power, but ... Let us pray that she may be blessed with strength and purity of spirit and wisdom. There is nothing God cannot bring about if He chooses. Did not Saul of Tarus become Paul of Apostle?”

When Lord Mountbatten wrote to C.R. praising his English, Rajaji replied, “I am flattered. I attribute whatever I have done with English to a Globe Edition of Goldsmith’s Complete works and The Spectator volume giving all the essays of Addison, Steele and his colleagues in that journal. I read these two books voraciously at the age of 16 and enjoyed it.”

C.R was a voracious reader of books, especially Indian and English Literature. On the famous novel of George Orwell, “Animal Farm”, he commented, I cannot admire the much boosted book of George Orwell, Filling up the whole book with animals will not make a fable. Aesop knew his animals and knew how long or short, a fable should be.”

### **Master of Crisp Writing**

C.R. mastered the art of crisp writing. Here is one of the choicest sayings of this wordsmith on religion. He says, “The foundation for science as well as for religion is wonder...it is science to find out the answers to wonder through investigation and experiment. When we reach the limit of such investigation and the wonder still remains unanswered, we pass on from wonder to awe and that is worship.”

### **Believer in Hindu Doctrines**

Rajaji was a firm believer in the efficacy of the Hindu doctrines to strengthen the human mind in this troubled world. Of course, he was totally against the superstitious practices in the

religion, which marred its image. He always supported equality and fought against caste discrimination.

Of course, he sometimes reviewed his family history. He took pride in his ancestry (Iyengar) which goes back to Nallan Chakravarthi and Ramnanuja.

He glorified Hinduism in the following crisp words. “We have inherited the broadest culture and the most tolerant of all religious creeds.”

“The Children of the rishis of the Upanishads have a mission to the world.”

### **Comments on His Own Writing**

On his writings, he opines, “I have written books, stories and fables. But on the whole, I am not a man of letters. I have written mostly for causes – propaganda for the abolition of untouchability for instance.”

His writings are of permanent value. He was one of the greatest journalists of his time. He wrote for *Swarajya*, *Kalki*, *Young India* and *Harijan*. Rajaj’s adaptations of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are outstanding contributions to the world of letters. Readers all over the world have benefitted by these epic translations. This is indeed a very valuable contribution of an Indian writer.

### **Other Translations and Creative Writing**

Coming to his other writings, he translated *Thirukkural* and *The Bhagavad Gita* into English and wrote short stories and fables. He wrote books on Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Saint Lawrence. Had he not fully concentrated on the burning issues in politics of his day, he would have made still greater contribution to the world of letters.

### **G. K. Chesterton of India**

C.R was often compared to G. K. Chesterton. Noted British essay writer and journalist. Chesterton wrote for The Illustrated London News and his writings were noted for the variety, pungency and interest.

Though C.R was humble enough to say that he was not a great writer, recognition came to him from the Central Sahitya Akademi. His Ramayana in Tamil and English won him the award of the Sahitya Akademi. His Ramayana and Mahabharata continue to be reprinted by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in large numbers even today.

Why there is so much success of these epics in modern versions? Rajmohan Gandhi says, “The charm lies in the selection of episodes from the innumerable stories that abound the two vast epics. Characterization and lucid style are great factors in attracting the reader. C.R’s flow of thought is spontaneous and awe-inspiring.”

*The Sunday Standard* said, “Subhadra and Sita walk in our midst and speak a language we understand.” The writer approached the epics not as a great scholar or an ardent worshipper, but as a lover of great literature.”

### **Poetic Gift of Rajaji**

To get an idea o the poetic gift of C.R, one should go to Hiren Mukherji, a communist parliamentarian. This politician admired the English verses of Rajaji, translated from the Kamba Ramayana. He says,” I had chanced upon his English translation of Kamba Ramayana. It stirred me and I took an instant liking to one with whom I had little rapport.”

### **A Lieutenant of Gandhi**

In one of his speeches, Rajaji says, “Must we not learn to be disciplined? Must we not learn to study well? Must we not learn to behave rightly?” He laid strong emphasis on morality. He did everything under the influence of Gandhian principles to lift the downtrodden people from their pitiable condition. His exposure to the western scholars and his contact with Swami Vivekananda and other emerging leaders of Congress had tremendous impact on his young mind towards the freedom of India. He was a simple man among all the lieutenants of Gandhiji who followed probity in thought, word and action. Gandhiji’s policy of truth and non-violence could not be followed easily, but Rajaji had imbibed Gandhian thought, because, he pretty well knew the fact that

Gandhiji alone could guide India, steer the nation through the political turmoil and lead the country to freedom.

### **Zeal for Social Reforms**

Rajaji entered into politics as he had great zeal for social reforms. He said and did what he thought was right, with no fear of displeasing the people and the leaders. The social reform movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century tried to achieve three main objectives. They are: a) removal of inequalities in general rigidities and untouchability in particular b) emancipation of women from their ignorant status and extension of equal rights to them c) prohibition of alcoholic drinks.

### **A Man of Culture**

Rajaji was a man of culture. He was gifted with amazing intellectual brilliance. He spoke of culture as a pattern of life not necessarily at its best, but all of it that is good and pleasing in some measure. Though religion is a constitutional necessity of man, it is not the same all the time. It has to stand the test of time. In order to prove its capacity to guide men towards perfection, it must be founded on humanism and reason, which are the wheels of Renaissance. Spiritual humanism of Rajaji, will be the panacea to all the problems of human society, because it establishes equality between work and worship on the basis of divine nature prevalent in man. Spiritual humanism proposes the link between God and man.

Rajaji's concern for human development in all its aspects, his consideration of divinity of human nature, which expounds the glory of human characteristics, his concern for the Indian masses, his concept of purity and faith in human potency and his advocacy of ethos – all prove him as a great humanist of twentieth century. His life was dedicated to righteousness and he never deviated from the path of virtue.

### **Public Speaking**

Rajaji made no attempt to be an orator. He could speak to audience in Tamil or English eloquently, persuasively and extemporaneously. The talk, like his writing, was clear and precise and the number of words were no more than the occasion demanded. Brevity, clarity and precision

were the hallmarks of his speeches and writings. For example, he says, “People in India have become lazy. This is our greatest weakness. We cannot afford to lose time. We should work all the time. “

In another speech he says, “Friends, as I am not tired of repeating, hardwork is wanted now. Success cannot be achieved unless every limb of the body begins to work.”

Regarding Gandhiji’s death, he said “He was a rocket which went up in a blaze and disappeared in the sky. It did not come down to die. It died at its highest illumination... let us try as far as we can keep his memory not in marble and plaster or bronze but in the tissue of our hearts.”

### **Mastery over English**

His mastery over English can be established even from his innumerable speeches and writings as a public figure for many decades. Indian freedom struggle has provided many heroes unparalleled in the history of mankind. Among them, was Rajaji, a great leader and Gandhi’s sincere follower. Politics did not daunt him, power did not corrupt him, for dharma was his lode-star and his shield invulnerable. He was the first and last Governor-General of independent India. He was also the Chief Minister of Madras State twice. In whichever position he occupied, he brought name and fame to it.

### **To Conclude**

To conclude, it can be said that C.R.’s literary abilities, political maturity, saintliness of character and love of righteousness are all embedded in his speeches and writings and they have carved for him a permanent place in the hearts of people across the world. A forceful teaching flowed from his pen. Today’s developments have made it difficult for people, especially the younger generation, to understand the true worth of Rajaji.

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