

Presence of Mind and Communication Skills of Dr. C. N. Annadurai

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Abstract

Presence of mind implies the presence of the thinking faculties in time of difficult or dangerous situations, which enable a man to think clearly and act promptly. It is usually found naturally for good leaders of men, being one of the qualities which make them fit for leadership. The man who has developed his powers of thought by education or by reading many books, and keeps his body strong and able, is more likely to act in difficult situation with wisdom and promptitude than one whose mind and body are enfeebled by indulgence. This paper attempts to draw the Dr. C N Annadurai's presence of mind as well as his communication skills.

Keywords: Dravidian leader, C.N. Annadurai, Chief Minister, Presence of Mind, Oratory Skills, Rajya Sabha, Tamil Nadu Assembly, Yale University.

Introduction

“Presence of mind” means ability to react quickly and keep cool in an emergency of any kind. It is not the opposite, of absent-mindedness, but of “losing one’s head”⁽¹⁾. The words mind and head in these phrases mean reason; and so one who has presence of mind in danger is one who has such control over his nerves that his reason is not upset, but still directs his actions.

Presence of mind would be helpful in many situations, taking an advantage that nobody else would think of. which might even save your life one day⁽²⁾. For example, a chef is making some Indian sweets from fresh milk, boiling gallons of fresh milk only to realize later some of the milk was spoiled which ended up spoiling all of the milk⁽²⁾. Normally it would have to be thrown away resulting in a loss of money, but the chef makes sure to reduce the loss of his boss and instead make some cottage cheese out of it which makes even costlier sweets. This is the Chef’s presence of mind in cooking.

In other words, the Presence of mind is, to some extent, a gift; that is, some people have it naturally⁽¹⁾. Such people are very fortunate; for their presence of mind in a difficult situation or dangerous situation may save them from taking a false step which might mean ruin to them or others. But all are not so fortunate.

Annadurai’s Early Life:

Annadurai hailed from a middle-class family and he was a very good orator and writer both in Tamil and English. After completing his post-graduation in Economics and Politics, Annadurai started his career as a School Teacher⁽³⁾.

Afterwards, Annadurai joined the “Dravidar Kazhagam” / D.K. of Thanthai Periyar E. V. Ramasamy and became an atheist⁽³⁾. After some years, he left the teaching profession and took writing stage-dramas as his full-time profession. And he started writing drama-scripts and acted in them. Out of about 60 of his stage plays, many of them were later converted into successful Tamil Movies.

Annadurai had difference of opinions with E V R Periyar in policy matters of the party and in the personal life activities of his leader. So, Annadurai came out of the D.K. party and started his own party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam / D.M.K. He surpassed all the D.K and D.M.K leaders in his oratory skills and in organizing millions of Tamils around the world into a dedicated community. For the last 2000 years of recorded history there was no other leader like Annadurai among Tamils.⁽¹²⁾

Thereafter Annadurai switched over from atheism and declared his attitude regarding the religions and faith in God as “Ondre Kulam-Oruvane Devan”/ “**One Community- One God**”⁽³⁾. According to Annadurai, all the communities are equal and one and all religions and gods are all one. Anna's contributions to Tamil as film, script, story, and dialogue writer are substantial. Anna, in order to popularise his ideals, utilised these media very effectively. His first drama "Chandrodayam" was thematic. He formed a troupe in Kanchi in his "Dravidanadu " office and gave roles to his comrades C. V. Rajagopal, K. Subramaniam and Ezhathu Adigal. He took the leading role of Dorairaj himself. His "Nallathambi" and "Velaikkari" were fine film hits. "Velaikkari" and “One night" with K. R. Ramasami in the lead were staged in Thanjavur for many months. Anna's dialogues were so superb, telling, magnetic and effective that Kalki Krishnamoorthy compared him to Bernard Shaw and Ibsen.

M. G. Ramachandran, the famous Tamil actor known as “Makkal Thilagam -MGR” joined Annadurai’s D.M.K. Being an actor himself, Annadurai believed that the cinema actors can and will become popular and become even the Chief Ministers of States. Annadurai will ever be remembered as a statesman and a scholar, a litterateur and a social reformer, a mass leader and a friend of the poor.

Mesmerizing Speech of Annadurai

C. N. Annadurai, popularly known as “**Perarignar Anna**” meaning Great Wise-Elder Brother became the first “Non-Congress”/Dravidian Party Chief Minister of Tamilnadu after 20 years of Independence of India, until then the Indian National Congress had been the ruling party in the State of Madras/Tamilnadu. Annadurai was an original thinker, editor of magazines, orator, book

lover and a good administrator. Anna's contributions to oratory and journalism are outstanding. People used to purchase tickets for his special meetings, travel hundreds of miles, walk 10 to 12 miles, to hear him. Anna usually came very late. Normally he spoke for 40, 45 minutes. But from first to last, he held the people spell bound, moving them to heights of feeling, producing peals of laughter, mesmerizing them with his matchless eloquence. It is very moving, even now, to hear Anna's voice, in tapes. Easily he is the best orator Tamil Nadu has ever produced. He took Tamil to the masses and enthroned it in Fort St. George.

Madras Presidency was Renamed as Tamil Nadu

When the Constitution of India declared Hindi as the official language in 1965, Anna revolted to ensure that English would be the official language of India. In this revolt Anna was under arrest for inducing the agitation and it was this one action that led to DMK's first landslide victory in 1967 and Anna becoming the Chief Minister of erstwhile Madras Presidency which he changed into 'Tamil Nadu'- The land of Tamils. His crowning act was the naming of the then Madras State as " Tamil Nadu ".

Annadurai was Called as South India's George Bernard Shaw

Annadurai was a prolific writer and speaker both in English and Tamil – dramatist comparable with George Bernard Shaw – a fine conversationalist like Samuel Johnson. As a writer, he has produced about 50 short novels, more than 100 short stories and two dozen dramas. All his books were sold like hot cakes in the market. His “epistles” to “Thambi” in “Dravida Nadu” created history and people in thousands waited in the newspaper stalls for the arrival of his weekly. Such was the fancy he could create. Those epistles have been published in 20 volumes and they are relevant even today. His captivating captions, subtle satires, similes, metaphors, allegories – most of them at least – are green in the memories of thousands of his followers, even now. Such was the impact of his writings. Millions of people, particularly the youngsters, were attracted by the wonderful eloquence of Dr. Annadurai. Statistical evidence shows that Dr. Annadurai stood first among the Indian leaders in attracting the largest audience. He was not only well versed in Tamil **speeches** but equally proficient and well versed in **English**. His speeches were

very attractive, interesting, inspiring and, above all, thought-provoking. That is the reason he was also called as “**South India’s George Bernard Shaw**⁽⁸⁾” by the people of Tamil Nadu.

Self-Respect Movement

C. N. Annadurai's era was marked by media options that combined journalism and literature on the one hand and theatre and cinema on the other for wider reach. Radio was obviously not available. Launching of newspapers or literary magazines for propagating their thoughts was a viable option although their commercial success is debatable. Media as vehicles of political communication were institutionalized and a holistic view of the history of Indian media would then allow us to see how in the present scenario political consolidation is also invariably linked to direct ownership of print and television channels.

Language was an important issue during Anna's time. Some might argue it remains crucial even today. It is important to note that Anna himself had an open mind on the question, asking only for a home-grown solution over a period of time. He wanted all `regional languages' to have the status of national languages. This is yet to become a reality. Anna took to writing for small vernaculars before being drawn into politics. Anna was extremely popular with people of Tamil Nadu as he started the ‘Self-respect’ movement, which was started to restore the pride and culture, which he claimed was overshadowed by the Hindi speaking Aryans.

People followed him as he was an acclaimed orator, well versed in Tamil and English literature, and as a stage actor. Which is why till date, filmdom seems to be the most natural route to political fiefdom in Tamil Nadu. Annadurai’s popularity before entry into politics was mainly due to his active protests against Hindi-imposition as an official language in 1928, whipped regional passion of the Tamil speaking people that they would be treated as second-class citizens, as Hindi was language of Aryans or the North Indians. Congressman Rajaji suggested the use of Hindi as a compulsory language in schools in 1938 & Annadurai, along with other Tamil leaders opposed. When the ‘Madras State’ withdrew this idea, the victory of the Tamil bolstered Anna’s political journey & later on reaped huge political dividends.

Public Speaker

Annadurai was a powerful orator of his time and he produced a number of speeches with allusion, diction, alliteration. Anna's contributions to oratory and journalism are outstanding. People used to purchase tickets for his special meetings, travel hundreds of miles, walk 10 to 12 miles, to hear him. Anna usually came very late. Normally he spoke for 40, 45 minutes. But from first to last, he held the people spell bound, moving them to heights of feeling, producing peals of laughter, mesmerizing them with his matchless eloquence. It is very moving, even now, to hear Anna's voice, in tapes. Easily he is the best orator Tamil Nadu has produced. He took Tamil to the masses and enthroned it in Fort St. George. His crowning act was the naming of the then Madras State as " Tamil Nadu ". When Annadurai was too late for a election meeting, and people were waiting for long, he gave this speech in the poetic form. This is explained in an example by an episode as follows:

Mathaama Chittirai,
Maniyo Patharai,
Ungalai Thazhuvuvatho nithirai,
Marakkamal emakku iduvir Muthirai.

Chubb Fellowship at Yale University^(7,9):

C. N. Annadurai was the prominent Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu State of India , who was known for his proficiency in languages - particularly English and Tamil. Once he proceeded on a world tour as an invitee of the Yale University's Chubb Fellowship Programme and was also a guest of the State Department in the USA in April-May 1968. There he was requested to speak to the students. During an interactive session held with students, guys were allowed to ask some puzzle like questions that tests one's English proficiency. One of the guys in that hall stood up and asked him to say a hundred words in English which don't contain the letters A, B, C or D.

Annadurai immediately started to tell the words one by one: One, two, three, four ... up to ninety-nine! Everyone present in the hall were surprised and waiting for his 100th word. If he said

'hundred' ... he would have failed but after 'ninety nine' he said 'STOP'. The hall was filled with a minute of huge applause.

The second question that was asked to him and his response is even more famous. Let me see if anyone can answer it right. The question was: Construct a sentence with the word "because" repeating thrice (one after the other and not in different part of the sentence).

The instantaneous response from Dr. C. N. Annadurai was: **No sentence ends in because, because, because is a conjunction word.**

The crowd again applauded in claps. Similarly, he said about a person who bored him like "A saw I saw was such a saw I ever saw". He was awarded the Chubb Fellowship at Yale University being the first non-American to receive this honour. In the same year 1968, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Annamalai University.

Union is Anion

During his days in Dravida Kazhagam, Annadurai had supported Periyar's call for an independent Dravida Nadu. The claim for such an independent state stayed alive in the initial days of DMK. During Hindi agitation some students raised their voice for bifurcation of India and separate 'Dravida nadu'. In a short period during the year 1967 Anna assumed as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu he was invited to the Pachaiyappa College as the "Chief guest" for a function arranged by the student union to deliver a speech on 'union'. A press reporter wanted to corner Annadurai and questioned him "What is Union?" (The reporter thought Annadurai could not give proper answer for his question.)

Anna in his own style replied 'Union is Anion' with a rhyming word.

All the people kept mum after his quick reply. 'Union' is "Anion."

Magnanimity ⁽¹¹⁾

Annadurai had magnanimity and never accused the opponents and degraded them. To prove that we can recollect one episode took place in Yale University while Annadurai was

addressing a press-meet. One media person asked him, what was the reason for the Congress party's defeat after a long period of ruling the country.

Annadurai replied that "Familiarity" breeds contempt. i.e. the people like a change when one party's rule continued for a long time. They wanted a change, that is all. His reply shows here that he doesn't accuse the opponents. It shows his magnanimity and his politeness in the political career.

A Sense of Humor in Tamil Nadu Assembly ⁽¹⁰⁾

C.N Annadurai had a sense of humor while he was on the chair of the chief minister of Tamil Nadu. Once one opposite party legislative leader Vinayagam made a complaint, "I have donated a Tiger's female cub to Zoological Park of Vandalur. Cine actor M G Ramachandran donated a tiger's male cub. The zoo caretakers pay more attention to the male cub and not equal care is paid to the female cub that I have donated". Annadurai immediately replied brothers-in-law of cub can only solve this issue. It is not fair part for me, to intervene in this dispute. The whole assembly audience of the floor burst in – to laugh.

A Brilliant Answer ⁽¹¹⁾

When there was a debate, an opposition member Vinayagam sarcastically commented on Annadurai, remarking on his ailment and went to the extent of saying "Your days are counted" to which Annadurai immediately retorted "But my steps are measured". That is the wit of Anna.

Respect for Opponents

Annadurai praised the opponents. This is also one of the appreciable behaviours of Annadurai. Once a reporter asked him "What was the reason for the defeat of Mr. K. Kamaraj the popular C.M. of Tamil Nadu in the election?"

Annadurai replied that "It was quite an unfortunate thing"; this happens in the politics. We have to wait to find out such a selfless leader without any faults for at least one thousand years."

Captivating Oratory Power in English

The communication skill of Anna captivates the audience, even some great orators. Here we can find it in this episode. When Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister of India, Anna and his party vehemently opposed Hindi as the official language. This agitation angered Nehru. He was angry with Anna's movements. In the Parliament, once as an elected Rajya Sabha member Anna made a speech for the first time. As the time limit was over his speech, the speaker pointed out the time, he signaled to Anna to conclude the speech. But Nehru intervened and requested the Chairman of the House to allow more time for this captivating speech without any grudge or prejudicial view against Anna. His communication skills captivated not only the audience but also great leaders like Nehru ⁽⁸⁾. When silence was restored he began his address.

Conclusion

The presence of mind, sense of humor, authoritativeness, confidence, magnanimity, and communication skills are qualities noticed in many great leaders. Communication is the art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. Most people judge another person on the basis of his / her presence of mind and language skills and form an opinion based on their perception. Clear communication is the most important key to a leader's success.

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