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THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1946 : POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ISSUE IN MADRAS CONGRESS AND PREMIERSHIP ISSUE IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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ABSTRACT

In the General Elections of 1946, Congress won a resounding victory in the Madras Presidency. After the election, an internal tussle began among the Congress leaders of the Madras Presidency. There were factional groups functioning in the Madras Provincial Congress. Both Telugu and Tamil leaders competed for the post of Premiership in the Madras Presidency in 1946. The candidates who competed in the fray were T.Prakasam, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Rajaji and C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar. The Congress High Command supported the candidature of Rajaji and Madras Congress Legislature Party backed T.Prakasam and Tamil Nadu Congress Committee headed by K.Kamaraj placed C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar as candidature in the contest for Premiership of the Madras Presidency. This paper highlights the power struggle that ensued in the Madras Presidency following the 1946 general election among the prominent leaders of Congress.



KEYWORDS: Rajaji, K.Kamaraj, Gandhi, Patel, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar , T. Prakasam, Madras Presidency.

INTRODUCTION

Among the Congress leaders of the Madras presidency, there were two prominent personalities; one was Rajaji, who had the support of the high command (the All India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.) and important leaders of the A.I.C.C. throughout India) and the other was K. Kamaraj, President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee(T.N.C.C.) and disciple of Satyamurthi. Despite the presence of these leaders, T. Prakasam of Andhra became Premier of the Madras Presidency by defeating C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, a leader of the National Congress, a candidate sponsored by K.Kamaraj. The fact is that T. Prakasam, although he came from the Andhra region, did not have the majority support of members of his region.

Rajaji, who was the premier of the first congress ministry had the natural right to become premier, could not determine his claim due to his actions and policies before 1946. He later returned to Congress with strong opposition after his departure in 1942. But he had a group of his own.

The T.N.C.C. was under the full control of K.Kamaraj, the president of Congress. In the T.N.C.C. executive body, of the 14 members, 13 were with him and were Kamaraj's supporters. But the Madras

Legislative Congress Party was the combination of members of the entire Madras Presidency. No meetings of the legislature was held since November 1939 after the resignation of the Rajaji ministry. During the years of World War II, the Madras Presidency was under the Governor's rule. The Assembly was not dissolved until October 1, 1945, although the Rajaji Ministry resigned in 1939.¹

New elections were ordered but were not completed by March 31, 1946.² When Rajaji's first ministry resigned in October 1939, the distribution of seats for the various parties in the Legislative Assembly was as follows: Congress-162, Justice-17, Independents - 10, European Group-7, Muslim League-13, Anglo Indian-2, Independent National Democratic Party-Nil, Communist-nil. Totally 211 seats.³ When the election results for 213 of 215 seats were announced, the party's position was as follows in May 1946: Congress-163, Muslim League-28, Independents-7 Europeans-7, Communists - 2 and National Democrats-6 Total: 213.⁴

There was so much speculation about who the prime minister would be.⁵ Since K.Kamaraj was against Rajaji and the High Command was in favor, Patel asked Kamaraj to specify his choice.⁶ Kamaraj favored neither Rajaji nor Prakasam and his choice were not known. When the chances of Prakasam becoming premier were bright, the opposition group in their Andhra region, led by Dr Pattabhi Sitaramayya, went to Delhi to explain the situation in the Madras Presidency and prevent Prakasam from becoming prime minister. Rather than directly oppose the name of Prakasam, they informed the High Command that the situation was dire in the Madras Presidency due to famine and shortage of fabrics and that in such difficult conditions, a suitable leader would have to be chosen unless, if that had been done, the province would have gone to the ruins.⁷

The politics of the Andhra group also played a role in the provincial politics of Madras. In the Andhra region there were groups of Prakasam and Pattabhi Sitaramayya who opposed each other both in the party and in the legislature.⁸ But due to the strength of Prakasam's personality, the election to the Presidential Assembly in Madras was not as problematic as in the Tamil region. Of the 163 members of the Madras Legislature Congress Party (M.L.C.P.), some 20 legislators from the Andhra region and some 30 legislators of the Tamil region opposed him.⁹ It was under these circumstances that the election of the leader for the M.L.C.P. was to take place.¹⁰ When B. Gopal Reddy, an opponent of Andhra's Prakasam, invited Sardar Vallabhai Patel to attend the elections of the leaders, expressed his inability to come to Madras and suggested that the appropriate course would be for the leaders of the three regions of Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala combine their ideas and come to an acceptable decision. The Congressional High Command (C.H.C.), particularly Patel, had not given up on the idea of appointing Rajaji as premier, although the latter had withdrawn from the competition. This is revealed by a letter from Patel to Gopal Reddy.¹¹ He believed that there was no leader who could win the trust of all groups. Rajaji's absence had left a void and there was no one to take his place. We can only hope Madras doesn't make a pitiful sight when the Cabinet Mission came to India to discuss the issue of the transfer of full responsibilities.

On April 4, 1946, Prakasam, Madhava Menon, Kamaraj, the Presidents of the A.P.C.C., K.P.C.C. and T.N.C.C. were summoned by telegram to Delhi from Patel to consult and resolve the leader's problem.¹² He also invited Rajaji also in Delhi.¹³ In a separate letter addressed to V.V. Giri, Patel openly expressed his wish in favor of Rajaji and at the same time expressed his doubts about Rajaji's selection.¹⁴ On April 9, the invited leaders also met with Gandhi who talked to them in general and to Prakasam in particular. He advised Prakasam not to participate in the contest and even advised him not to accept even the ordinary ministry. Gandhi spoke at length with Kamaraj and Madhava Menon. He also advised them to accept Rajaji. Both of them expressed difficulties in accepting him as a leader due to the mood of the party men. Gandhi then advised them to accept Pattabhi Sitaramayya as their leader with whom they agreed. It was because they were able to eliminate Rajaji and Prakasam's choice. They met with Sardar Patel and told him what had happened.

In this regard a question arose among the Congress leaders about Gandhi's unfavourable attitude towards Prakasam, a true Gandhian and popular leader. It was a complaint against T. Prakasam who used public funds for his own benefit. Therefore, as a principled leader, Gandhi wanted

him not to accept even the ministership position. Gandhi was informed that Pattabhi Sitaramayya could only be elected with the cooperation of the Rajaji group.¹⁵

On April 11, when the leaders met Patel again, he advised them to consult M.A. Azad, the President of the A.I.C.C., to receive instructions from him. Azad's advice did not agree with Gandhi's intention. He warned them that the M.L.C.P. should have taken Rajaji and his team, including Prakasam, and this was also Gandhi and Patel's wish.¹⁶ It is evident that the President of the Congress M.A. Azad, Gandhi and Patel, after consulting with each other, came to the conclusion that the old Congress Ministry that functioned during 1937-1939 under Rajaji had to be returned. They also believed that corruption and inefficiency could be controlled if only Rajaji was positioned. Rajaji's simplicity and integrity alone was considered different from his stand during the years 1940 to 1945. The high command, after making this decision, sent a telegram to the members of the M.L.C.P. to elect Rajaji as their leader and also stated that acceptable only for Gandhi and Patel. Nehru's sight could not be determined. However, his silence reveals that he also accepted the decisions of Gandhi, Patel and Azad. This was done before Azad met the leaders of the Congress of the Madras Presidency. Azad had carefully underlined the point that the above recommendation was only a recommendation and not an obligation.¹⁷ Prakasam, who was sad and disappointed, realized perfectly well that the High Command was not in his favor. He expressed his willingness to work with Rajaji if Rajaji was acceptable to the Legislature Party.¹⁸

Prakasam was eliminated from the High Command and Rajaji did not like the Kamaraj group. But at the same time they would not go against the wishes of national leaders. Rajaji was also aware that although it was a choice of the High Command, his election will not be easy. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was acceptable to the High Command and the Kamaraj group. If Rajaji had also supported Pattabhi's candidacy along with his group, his election and success would have been brilliant. Kamaraj met Rajaji and asked for his help in choosing Pattabhi. Rajaji refused to help Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Since Rajaji refused to support Pattabhi, he withdrew from the competition.¹⁹

The M.L.C.P. met on April 18, 1946 in Madras to consider the suggestion of the C.H.C. under the presidency of V.V. Giri. The only item on the agenda was the consideration of the advice given by the High Command in favor of the election of Rajaji as leader. Rajaji and his group who came to learn of the advice of the High Command appealed to M.L.C.P. members to fully support Rajaji's candidature.²⁰ The question of accepting or rejecting the appeal was left to voting. This was done for the first time. The M.L.C.P. rejected the C.H.C.'s advice to elect Rajaji as leader with 148 votes to 38. Rajaji's candidacy was not acceptable to the majority. The meeting was postponed to April 19, 1946 and the M.L.C.P.'s decision was also communicated to the C.H.C.²¹ In this situation, Azad asked V.V. Giri to select more than one person for leadership and send them the names for their final selection.²² The C.H.C.'s suggestion to send the name panel was also rejected by the M.L.C.P. on April 19, 1946.²³

At the time, a rumor spread about a press report that Gandhi had given the M.L.C.P. the freedom to choose the leader of its choice, be it Prakasam or anyone else. A member of the Congress, Sivanthi B. Adityan asked Gandhi to allow the M.L.C.P. to freely elect the leader.²⁴ But Gandhi denied the previous press release and reported through the press that he did not say anything to anyone but wrote a private letter to Prakasam that Prakasam had the freedom to publish.²⁵ Rajaji and his group, who did not get a majority in the M.L.C.P., reacted differently. Rajaji's men made a failed attempt to form a Tamil Nadu National Congress with the aim of bringing together all the people of Tamil Nadu who had faith in Rajaji's leadership.²⁶

Throughout the leadership issue, the Andhra group led by B. Gopala Reddy, Venkata Rao and Pallam Raju also opposed any attempt to bring Rajaji and the attempt to submit any leadership panel to the High Command. So the Andhra group convinced Kamaraj to run for leadership against Prakasam. Kamaraj, in consultation with his group, accepted the suggestion and appointed C.N. Muthurajanga Mudaliar as a candidate against Prakasam. M.A. Azad sent a telegram on April 22, 1946 to V. V. Giri in which he expressed his point of view. In the telegram Azad stated that considering the present situation in the Madras legislature, it would be useful if the Congress Party was given the opportunity of nothing for more than one one. Hence he did not say in his telegram who should be elected by the

party. However, if the party wanted to vote for only one name, it certainly could so. Please take the sense of the Party and elect one.²⁷

Kamaraj had chosen C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar for the leadership of the Assembly. It was because he was acceptable to many to some extent. Everyone thought that knowing Gandhi's views regarding Prakasam, the Rajaji group would support C. N. Muthuranga Mudaliar. But this did not happen when the election took place on April 23, 1946. K.R. Karant of Karnataka proposed the name Prakasam, which was seconded detached from N. Nagappa. Kamaraj proposed the name of C.N.Muthuranga Mudaliar which was supported by Madhava Menon. Twenty-nine members of the Rajaji group remained neutral. Prakasam was elected by secret ballot as leader by 82 to 69 polled by C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar. The neutrality of Rajaji's group helped the victory of T. Prakasam.²⁸ After the election, Prakasam asked Sardar Patel's advice regarding the formation of the Ministry, who in turn refused to give advice as his advice was deliberately ignored and informed that no further reference should be made to the High Command.²⁹

Prakasam submitted a list of the names of his ministers as desired by the Governor on April 29, 1946. The proclamation under section 93 was revoked on April 30, 1946. Prakasam and nine of his colleagues were sworn in. In the same day, Prakasam excluded former Rajaji's government ministers from his team, contrary to standard Congress policy in other provinces, where former ministers who resigned in 1939 were returned to their posts.

The events above reveal that the intra party affairs raised its ugly head even though freedom was not given. Gopal Reddy filed a complaint against Patel's appointment as minister. Prakasam who lost the confidence of the C.H.C., Kamaraj and Rajaji groups and the Andhra groups finally resigned from the post of the Premier of the Madras Presidency within a year of taking office.

To conclude, Congress was known for its factionalism ever since its inception. The all India issues created factional groups in the provincial politics. Madras Presidency was not an exception. As the Madras Presidency was multi-lingual region, the Malayalam, Telugu and Tamil leaders aspired to elect their own leaders for the post of Premiership. After a remarkable victory in the General Election of 1946, the leaders of the Madras Congress finally accepted T.Prakasam, a Telugu Congress leader as the Premier of the Madras Presidency. As he lost the confidence of Rajaji and Kamaraj, he could not be in power for a long time and able to govern the province hardly a year.

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