

**EMINENT PARLIAMENTARIANS
MONOGRAPH SERIES**

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI
1990**

LSS (PRIS-LC) / EPM / 7

© Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1990

December, 1990

Price : Rs. 50.00

Published under Rule 382 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha (Seventh Edition) and printed by the Manager, Photo-Litho Unit, Government of India Press, Minto Road, New Delhi.

Foreword

Most appropriately, the Indian Parliamentary Group decided in the beginning of this year to celebrate the birth anniversaries of eminent parliamentarians with a view to recalling and placing on record the contributions made by them to country's parliamentary life and polity. As a part of this activity, a monograph series—known as the 'Eminent Parliamentarians Monograph Series'—was started in March 1990 with a Monograph on Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. This was followed by similar Monographs being brought out on Dr. Lanka Sundaram, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, Pandit Neel Kanth Das, Shri Panampilli Govinda Menon and Shri Bhupesh Gupta in connection with their birth anniversaries.

The present Monograph — the seventh in the series — is a modest attempt to recapitulate the services rendered and contributions made by Dr. Rajendra Prasad who shaped the destiny of this country in his capacity as President of the Indian National Congress on as many as three occasions, as President of the Constituent Assembly and finally as the First President of our Republic for thirteen long years.

The volume consists of three parts. In part one has been given a brief profile of the first president of India highlighting a few glimpses of his eventful life. Part two contains as many as 19 articles authored by his contemporaries and close associates and Members of Parliament, both present and former, some of whom have had the opportunity of observing him from close quarters. Part three contains excerpts from some select speeches of Dr. Prasad delivered in the Constitution-making body over which he had the honour to preside.

On the occasion of his birth anniversary, we pay our respectful tributes to the memory of Dr. Rajendra Prasad and hope that this Monograph would be found useful and interesting.

NEW DELHI;
DECEMBER, 1990

RABI RAY
Speaker, Lok Sabha
and
President, Indian Parliamentary Group.

Contents

PART ONE

His Life

1

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

A profile

(1)

PART TWO

Articles

2

RAJENDRA BABU : THE NATION BUILDER

Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma

(19)

3

TRIBUTE TO RASHTRAPATI RAJENDRA PRASAD

Professor N.G. Ranga

(24)

4

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : A MAN AMONG MEN

S. Nijalingappa

(27)

5

RAJEN BABU

Dr. Balram Jakhar

(32)

6

**DESHRATNA DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : A RARE EXAMPLE OF
TRUTH AND SIMPLICITY**

Bhagwat Jha Azad

(39)

(iii)

7

A GREAT PRESIDENT OF A GREAT COUNTRY

R. Ramanathan Chettiar

(43)

8

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : CHILDHOOD AND VILLAGE LIFE

Valmiki Chowdhary

(45)

9

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : OUR FIRST PRESIDENT

S.W. Dhabe

(57)

10

**DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : HIS ROLE AS FIRST
PRESIDENT OF INDIA**

Professor Balraj Madhok

(63)

11

RAJENDRA PRASAD : A BORN PRESIDENT

Professor P.G. Mavalankar

(68)

12

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : A GREAT LIFE GREATLY LIVED

Dr. Sushila Nayar

(77)

13

BHARAT RATNA : DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD

Ramlal Rahi

(88)

(iv)

14

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : A SYMBOL OF OUR CULTURE

Chaudhari Ranbir Singh

(92)

15

RAJEN BABU : SOME GLIMPSES

Chaudhari Randhir Singh

(96)

16

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD AND INDIAN PRESIDENCY

Somnath Rath

(99)

17

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : AS I KNEW HIM

Biren Roy

(103)

18

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : AN OUTSTANDING PERSONALITY

Professor Raja Ram Shastri

(105)

19

ARDHANARISHWAR OF INDIAN POLITICS

Professor Sideshwar Prasad

(108)

20

RAJEN BABU : HUMILITY IN GREATNESS

Satyendra Narayan Sinha

(121)

21

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD : LIFE, WORK AND IDEOLOGY

Dr. Sawai Singh Sisodia

(125)

(v)

PART THREE

His Ideas

**EXCERPTS FROM SOME SELECT SPEECHES OF
DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD IN CONSTITUENT
ASSEMBLY / PARLIAMENT**

22

**ON ELECTION AS PRESIDENT OF
CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY**

(133)

23

FREEDOM AT MIDNIGHT

(136)

24

CALL TO THE NEW-BORN NATION

(139)

25

UNVEILING MAHATMA GANDHI'S PORTRAIT

(144)

26

DISCUSSION ON DRAFT CONSTITUTION—PROCEDURE FOR

(147)

27

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY VIS-A-VIS CONSTITUTION

(152)

28

ON ELECTION AS PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT

(171)

29

FIRST ADDRESS TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

(173)

(vi)

PART ONE

His Life



Dr. Rajendra Prasad : A Profile

One of the chief architects of modern India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was an eminent freedom fighter, a renowned jurist, an eloquent Parliamentarian, an able administrator, a statesman *par excellence* and above all, a humanitarian to the core. An ardent follower and a repository of the trust and confidence of Mahatama Gandhi, he represented all that is best in our culture. As President of the Constituent Assembly and subsequently as occupant of the highest office of the land consecutively for two terms, he played a very important role in shaping the destiny of the nation and left an indelible imprint on our national life and polity.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, affectionately addressed as 'Rajen Babu' by friends and admirers, was born in a remote village in Saran district of Bihar on 3 December, 1884—a year before the establishment of the Indian National Congress—the organisation he ultimately headed not once but thrice. His parents—Mahadev Sahay and Kamaleshwari Devi—led a simple, pure and dedicated life. Though the family had sufficient landed property, it was not, given to ostentatious living mixing freely with all the co-villagers particularly during festivals and poojas. Mahadev Sahay, a country gentleman and an eminent scholar of Persian and Sanskrit, took great delight in providing free Ayurvedic and Unani medicines to patients approaching him for treatment. His mother—a deeply religious lady—often used to narrate to child Rajen, stories from the ancient epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The environment at home in particular and in his village in general, which symbolised peace

and serenity, had a profound impact on the mind of child Rajen resulting in the inculcation in him in due course of the finest ideals of fellow-feeling, selfless service, purity, sacrifice, humility and simplicity.

His Education

Rajen Babu's village, like many of the typical Indian villages of the nineteenth century did not have even the basic facility of a primary school. So, he had his early education at the hands of a village *Maulvi* who also taught him Persian. Subsequently, he was sent to a High School in Chhapra District from where he also passed the Entrance examination of the University of Calcutta, the jurisdiction of which then extended over Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and Burma. In this examination, Rajen Babu put up a brilliant performance and topped the list. This achievement was considered as a splendid one and the first ever by a student hailing from Bihar.

In 1897, at the age of 13, as per the practice then prevailing in the Hindu society, he was married to Rajbanshi Devi, who became mother of his two sons and, as a true-to-tradition Hindu lady, totally merged her own identity in that of her husband.

Having passed the entrance examination, Rajen Babu joined the prestigious Presidency College, Calcutta. Despite being a junior in the College, he became a very popular student leader and was elected by a huge margin to the post of Secretary of the College Union.

At the College, he was persuaded by the great Scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose and others to opt for science subjects but he somehow preferred to join the arts. Even as a student, he displayed deep patriotic instincts. The anti-partition agitation that followed the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the processions slogans, speeches by nationalists had stirred him a great deal. In 1906, while pursuing studies at the Calcutta University, he attended, for the first time, a meeting of the Indian National Congress. In 1908, he organised the Bihar students' in Calcutta and formed the Bihar students' Conference—the first organisation of its kind in the whole of

India. It was this organisation that in the subsequent years, helped produce the cream of political leadership from Bihar. This was the first manifestation of the organisational skill of Rajendra Prasad which grew into a legend in the years that followed. At studies too, he was outshining everyone. He stood first in the B.A. examination and then joined M.A. in English. After successfully completing his post-graduation he, like many other stalwarts of the freedom movement, joined the law course. Around this time, he came into contact with Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale who, in view of young Rajendra's decent upbringing and brilliant academic record, wanted him to join the 'Servants of India Society'. However, the strong pressure exerted on him by the family members, dissuaded him from joining the Society.

As a lawyer

After completing his law studies, Rajen Babu set upon establishing himself as a legal practitioner in Calcutta in 1911. Very soon, he built up not only a large clientele, primarily because of purity of his character and innate integrity, but also earned the praise and respect of the judges by virtue of his incisive intellect, phenomenal memory and strict adherence to professional ethics. The judges placed great reliance on his legal acumen and logical arguments for they were the culmination of a deep and thorough study of the subject. No wonder therefore that by his intelligence and diligence, he met with success in the legal profession too. Once, when he was arguing a case before the eminent jurist and scholar Justice Ashutosh Mukherjee who was also the Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, the latter was so much impressed by his style of presentation of the case and forcefulness of arguments, that he offered him a faculty position in the Law Department of the University, which Rajen Babu accepted with gratitude. As a budding lawyer, he continued to play an active role in various literary, cultural and social activities and took keen interest in the All India Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.

While practising as a lawyer and simultaneously working as a Professor in the Calcutta University, he passed his M.L.

examination in 1915 topping the list. In 1916, with the creation of Patna High Court, he shifted his practice to Patna which marked a turning point in the life of Rajendra Prasad as subsequent incidents of his eventful life revealed.

As a disciple of Mahatma

Dr. Rajendra Prasad came under the spell of Mahatma Gandhi in 1917 when the latter organised Champaran Satyagraha to liberate the peasants from the exploitation of the British Indigo Planters. Earlier, in 1916 he had the opportunity of watching Mahatma Gandhi from close quarters at the Lucknow session of the All India Congress Committee. The Champaran Satyagraha became the precursor of the great non-violent national struggle that was subsequently launched under Gandhiji's leadership.

The British Government and the Indigo planters were obviously unhappy due to the presence of Mahatma Gandhi on the scene. He was summoned to appear in court where, as was to be expected, he preached and defended the principle of 'Satyagraha'. Gandhiji invited Rajendra Prasad and some other advocates to assist him in the cause of peasants. Young Rajendra Prasad responded to Gandhiji's call and participated in his experiment with 'Satyagraha'. The Champaran Satyagraha not only brought him closer to Mahatma Gandhi, but also changed the entire course of his life. Inspired by Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad began to live the life of a true Gandhian—washing his own clothes and utensils, travelling by III class in trains and giving up every ease and comfort without demur. He continued to lead a simple and humble life even when he occupied the highest office of the Head of the State. Under the active guidance of his mentor, he gave a new lead to the various movements in Bihar, aimed at taking the country nearer to the goal of freedom and economic regeneration.

The weapon of satyagraha launched by Gandhi in Champaran was perfected in Kaira. The peasants of Kaira district too, following the technique of Satyagraha, refused to

pay land revenue despite imperial Government's enforcement of punitive measures. The Government had no other alternative but to yield. If Champaran Satyagraha made Rajendra Prasad believe in Gandhian mode of Satyagraha, the splendid success at Kaira drew him closer to Gandhi and strengthened his belief that the weapon of Satyagraha was the only effective way of protest against exploitation by the foreign rulers. Thus, Rajendra Prasad was the first leading figure from the Eastern provinces to join Gandhiji just as Vallabhbhai Patel was the first from the Western provinces.

As a freedom-fighter

Much before Rajen Babu arrived in Calcutta to pursue his graduation, his mind and heart were occupied with patriotic and nationalistic ideas, for he had already been initiated into the cult of 'Swadeshi' by his elder brother. Inspired by the Gandhian ideology, his clarion call to the countrymen and his distinct and unprecedented mode of protest against the colonial rulers, Rajendra Prasad took a plunge into the political struggle with the unflinching aim of freeing the country from the clutches of colonialism.

After the Rowlatt Act of 1918 and Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, Rajendra Prasad concurred with Gandhiji that the only effective weapon to deal with the British Government's inhuman actions and repressive laws was 'non-cooperation'. He was the first leader from Bihar to sign and undertake a pledge requiring every satyagrahi to remain non-violent during the protest against the Rowlatt Act which came to be dubbed as the 'Black Act'. It was around this time that Rajen Babu gave up the lucrative law practice he had so assiduously established to enable him to devote and dedicate himself wholly to the cause of liberation of the motherland. In 1924, as a part of the non-cooperation movement, Gandhiji launched a countrywide Satyagraha which received an overwhelming response from the people. The *Chauri Chaura* incident, however, in which an angry mob had set a Police Station on fire resulting in the death of several police personnel, forced the Mahatma to withdraw

the movement. Many leaders did not endorse Gandhiji's move of calling off the movement and described it as "the ignominious retreat". Rajendra Prasad, however, was one among those few of his associates who concurred with Gandhiji's decision and agreed with his assumption that the country was "not yet ripe for a non-violent non-cooperation movement". That was perhaps one of the reasons why Mahatma saw in Rajen Babu a great deal of himself and assigned him the constructive task of preparing people for the satyagraha, just before going to the prison on charges of sedition. When Rajen Babu heard the judgement sentencing Mahatma to 6 years' imprisonment, he broke down like a small child. Such was his emotional attachment and affection for Gandhiji.

In 1923, Rajen Babu actively participated in the Flag Satyagraha at Nagpur. The Government, anticipating trouble from the national leaders, imposed ban orders as a precautionary measure. After Seth Jamnalal Bajaj was arrested for leading the satyagraha against the punitive order, the movement was carried on by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and when his arrest too became imminent, the leadership passed on to Rajen Babu. It was during this time that Rajen Babu came into close contact with Sardar Patel whose friendship and association he cherished as one of the most pleasant memories of his life time.

In 1930, the British Government arrested Rajen Babu for taking part in the Salt Satyagraha. He was, however, released in 1934—before completion of his prison term—as the Government urgently needed his services for rendering help to the victims of the earthquake that had hit Bihar. The second long spell of imprisonment that Rajen Babu suffered was immediately after the passing of the Quit India Resolution in 1942 when he remained in jail for nearly 3 years till 1945.

As a front-ranking Congressman

Rajen Babu's association with the Indian National Congress began while he was still pursuing his graduation studies in Calcutta. During the AICC session held at Calcutta in 1906, Rajendra Prasad, who then worked as a volunteer, had an occasion to listen to the inspiring and patriotic speeches of the nationalist leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

However, it was only after the completion of his studies in 1911 that he joined the national organisation, that spearheaded the freedom struggle. Even when he was a lawyer and had a lucrative practice, he devoted his precious time to the Indian National Congress. He came into contact with Gandhiji in 1916 when the latter, for the first time, attended the Congress session after spending nearly two decades in South Africa.

In 1920, the Indian National Congress, at its session held in Nagpur, declared *Swaraj* as its ultimate goal. To spread this message as also the aims and objects of the Congress throughout the country, the party needed an efficient and dedicated band of workers. Rajendra Prasad, a constructive and dedicated worker toured the entire length and breadth of Bihar, explained to the people the plans and programmes of the Congress and thus established personal rapport with them. His earlier experience of organising Conferences during his student days enabled him to successfully make arrangements for thousands of delegates who had thronged to Gaya to attend the Congress session of 1922.

In 1937, when the Congress formed Ministries in the provinces, it was the Parliamentary Board consisting of Rajen Babu, Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad which ably and effectively provided guidance.

Rajen Babu joined the Indian National Congress in 1911 as an ordinary worker and served the organisation in various capacities for more than four decades. For him the Indian National Congress was an instrument for serving the people and fighting for the cause of India's freedom. From an ordinary

worker, he rose to become the president of the organisation, not once but thrice. For the first time, he was elected as its president in 1935 in recognition of the skill and ability demonstrated by him in conducting relief operations in the earthquake hit Bihar. He occupied this office again in 1939 following the resignation of Subhash Chandra Bose. Rajen Babu was elected President of the AICC for the third time in 1947, following the resignation of Acharya J.B. Kripalani. At that time he was already the Minister for Food and Agriculture in the interim Government and had also been presiding over the Constitution-making body.

As a writer

Rajendra Prasad was a litterateur in his own right. Besides, Hindi, his mother tongue, he knew Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian and English. Thus, he combined in himself the traditions of ancient, medieval and modern India even in the literary sense. To a great extent, Rajendra Prasad influenced public opinion through his writings and literary and journalistic works. He wrote a number of books in English and Hindi, besides, editing a few newspapers. In early 1920's, he took up the editing of a Hindi Weekly *Desh* and an English biweekly *Searchlight*. His *History of Champaran Satyagraha* was published in 1917 and another book *India Divided* in 1946. His *Atmakatha* was published in Hindi in 1946 and in English in 1957. This autobiography is considered to be a very valuable document depicting India's struggle for freedom. Yet another book titled '*At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi*,' containing the philosophy and teachings of his mentor, was published in 1955.

As an Effective Negotiator

Rajendra Prasad demonstrated his effectiveness and skills as a negotiator whenever he was called upon to do so. Alongwith his close associate Sardar Patel, he served on the Partition Council set up under the chairmanship of Lord Mountbatten. The other side in the Council was represented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan. Dr. Rajendra Prasad's deep

knowledge of the issues involved, his legal acumen, wisdom and gentleness made him an effective negotiator for India. It was primarily because of his clear perception, farsightedness and dexterity that he was able to bargain effectively and obtain for India an equitable, just and fair settlement of the assets and liabilities, and problems such as Central Services, currency and coinage, economic relations, armed forces and so on.

As a Humanitarian

Rajen Babu not only gave most precious years of his life to the freedom struggle but also worked for the betterment of the underprivileged throughout his life. He was an excellent humanitarian whose heart always went to the poor and the distressed. It was his total identification with the needy and the underprivileged and spirit of dedication for their cause which enshrined him in the hearts of millions of his countrymen. He earned great popularity as a social worker while serving the flood-affected people of Shahabad district. As Chairman of the Patna Municipal Corporation, he wanted to initiate many programmes aimed at providing better civic facilities to the people, but the paucity of funds and opposition to the levy of fresh taxes did not allow him to make much headway with his proposals. Consequently, he resigned after some time.

In 1930, when he was undergoing a long imprisonment following his participation in the Salt Satyagraha, a severe earthquake had hit Bihar leaving thousands dead and rendering millions homeless. Realising his selfless and dedicated social work, the British Government released Rajen Babu to enable him to lead the Committee engaged in relief work to the victims of disaster. Rajen Babu threw himself heart and soul into the relief work and was able to collect over Rs. 38 lakhs in a very short time. On the other hand, the Viceroy could muster only one third of Rajen Babu's total collection, despite the power, position, status and resources at his disposal. The whole nation appreciated and took note of the zeal, sincerity and humaneness with which Rajen Babu organised the relief services. Even the British Government admired his work. A year later, when another earthquake hit Quetta, it was again Rajen

Babu who was, in view of his past services chosen as the President of the Quetta Earthquake Relief Committee. Whatever work he took upon himself he did it with total devotion, selflessness and care. In this sense, he was indeed a *Karmayogi*.

As a Minister

In 1946, Rajen Babu served as the Minister of Food and Agriculture in the interim Government that was formed under the Prime Ministership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In view of his family background and active involvement in the cause of peasants, Rajen Babu knew everything about agricultural operations and practices. He felt that growing industrialization had disrupted the web of village life woven and integrated since long. He believed that any fresh effort to integrate the village life should be based on the Gandhian values. A firm believer in the maximisation of agricultural production and amelioration of the lot of peasants, he gave the slogan of "Grow More Food". The Ministry of Food and Agriculture, under his able and active guidance launched an effective campaign to that end.

When Rajen Babu assumed the portfolio of Food and Agriculture, the country was faced with a severe food shortage owing to the British policy of controls, rationing and compulsory procurement. The Congress, which was initially opposed to such controls during and immediately after the war, had to resort to controls for procurement and distribution of cheap grains to vulnerable sections of the population. However, many a Congress leader including Gandhiji resented this and ultimately Rajen Babu was only happy to dispense with the system of controls.

As President of the Constituent Assembly

When the Constituent Assembly was established in 1946 to frame a Constitution for free India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad who had been elected to it from the Bihar Province, was installed as its President without opposition. Felicitating Rajen Babu on his

election as the President of the Constitution-making body, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan had observed:

"In Dr. Rajendra Prasad, we have one who embodies the spirit of gentleness. He is the soul of goodness; he has great patience and courage, he has suffered ... Rajendra Prasad is the suffering servant of India, of the Congress who incarnates the spirit for which the country stands. I only hope that this spirit of amity, concord and harmony which has come down to us from the image of Siva in the Indus civilisation down to Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rajendra Prasad will inspire our efforts."¹

Paying compliments to Dr. Rajendra Prasad on his election, Dr. Sarojini Naidu said:

"Rajendra Prasad has descended spiritually from the Great Buddha, the embodiment of compassion, understanding, sacrifice and love ... In this House, where everyone had said with conviction that he would be the guardian and father of the House, I conceive him not as one with the flaming sword but an angel with the lily which wins victories over the hearts of men, because in him there is essential sweetness, that is part of his experience. There is an essential clarity of vision, creative imagination and creative faith that brings him very near the feet of Lord Buddha himself."²

His stewardship of the Constituent Assembly during its nearly three years long deliberations, stands out as a shining example of his high qualities. During this period, he guided, controlled and regulated the proceedings with utmost firmness, infinite patience, incisive intellect and abundant grace. He permitted members to have a free, frank and full discussion on issues before them and won the appreciation of every section of the House for his skill, objectivity and impartiality.

On 26 November, 1949, when the Constitution was finally

¹ Constituent Assembly Debate Vol I, 11 December 1946, p. 36.

² *Ibid* p. 47

adopted, Rajen Babu in his closing remarks as the Presiding Officer of the Constituent Assembly, congratulated the members for accomplishing the stupendous task of finalising the Constitution — one of the largest in the world. About the workability of the Constitution, he observed:

“Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend upon the way in which the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it... If the people who are elected are capable and men of character and integrity, they would be able to make the best even of a defective Constitution. If they are lacking in these, the Constitution cannot help the country”.³

The most important and memorable event of Rajen Babu's life was when the transfer of power from the British Government to the Government of India was effected through his hands in his capacity as the President of the Constituent Assembly.

As President of the Republic

On 24 January, 1950, the penultimate day of the last session of the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad was unanimously elected as the provisional President of India. He took the oath of office on 26 January, 1950. It is indeed a rare honour that the person who presided over the Constitution-making body was also given the onerous responsibility of defending, protecting and preserving the same. Subsequently, following the first general elections held in 1952 on the basis of adult franchise, he was elected as the first President of the republic in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. He was re-elected to this office for the second term in 1957.

Rajen Babu, along with India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, was able to establish many lasting precedents and conventions culminating in a healthy political relationship between the Head of the State and the Head of the Government. With the passage of time, these precedents have

³ *Ibid* p. 993

become the cornerstone of our vibrant Parliamentary democracy and have helped it in striking firm roots.

Even as an occupant of the highest office in India, and surrounded by pomp and show and the glitter of Rashtrapati Bhavan, Rajen Babu led a very simple life. He used to spin charkha almost everyday. His innate integrity, purity of character humility and devotion, love of humanity and depth of vision mark him out as a towering personality. He was rightly regarded as *Ajat Shatru* (one who has no enemies).

In 1962, he relinquished the office of the President of India which he had adorned for 12 long years and shifted to Sadaquat Asharam in Patna, to spend the remaining part of his life in its peaceful and quiet surroundings. On the fateful day of 28 February, 1963, this great son of Bharat Mata left for his heavenly abode, leaving behind nothing -but lofty ideas and ideals which this country will always cherish. In recognition of the yeoman's service rendered by this illustrious son of India, he was awarded, the same year, the nation's highest civilian award *Bharat Ratna*.

Tributes and Homages

On his passing away, the entire nation — the Parliament, the State Legislatures, the Press, leaders from all walks of life, and dignitaries from abroad mourned the sad demise of this colossus who had strode across India's national scene for decades, particularly during the period immediately before and soon after the attainment of independence.

Paying glowing tributes to his selfless life, devoted entirely to the service of the people of India, the then Speaker of Lok Sabha (S. Hukam Singh) had observed:

“A great freedom fighter and an ardent patriot, as President of the Constituent Assembly, he guided its deliberations with patience and foresight. He was the first President of India in very difficult and formative stages. An intellectual endowed with humility and humanism, he had worked among the poor and lowly and understood their difficulties. He maintained the dignity of the office and yet lived a

simple and dedicated life. He laid foundations and established traditions worthy of the constitutional Head of a State."⁴

In the Rajya Sabha, its Chairman (Dr. S. Radhakrishnan) eulogised the noble qualities of Rajen Babu in the following words:

"... It may be said of him more truly than of anyone else that he was a perfect gentleman, the embodiment of the best in Indian life, a symbol of the good Indian. His services to the nation have already become a saga in the history of the emancipation of our country... His extreme simplicity, great humility and complete lack of ostentation marked him out as a man of the people, the people he struggled to secure freedom for, and guided in shaping a worthy life in the newly-won freedom... As the first President of India for two continuous terms he adorned this place of highest honour and authority with rare distinction. He set the standards for correct constitutional behaviour..."⁵

On the occasion of unveiling of the portrait of Dr. Rajendra Prasad in the Central Hall of Parliament on 5 May, 1964 the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, recalling his long years of service and the manner in which he rendered it, had said:

"... For many long years he was associated and had worked with Gandhiji. His life was dedicated to service, right from the time when Gandhiji started his mission in India to the period when, after Gandhiji's death, he functioned as the President of India..."⁶

⁴ Lok Sabha Debates, 1 March 1963.

⁵ Rajya Sabha Debates, 1 March 1963, Col. 1381-82.

⁶ The Journal of Parliamentary Information, Vol. X, 1964, p. 12

Sources consulted

1. Sen, S.P. (ed): *Dictionary of National Biographies*, Vol. III, Calcutta, Institute of Historical Studies, 1973.
2. Ahluwalia, Shashi: *Founders of Modern India*, New Delhi, Manas Publications, 1986.
3. Choudhary, Valmiki (ed): *Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Correspondence and Select Documents*, Vol. 12, New Delhi Allied Publishers Limited, 1989.
4. Handa, R.L.: *Rajendra Prasad — Twelve Years of Triumph and Despair*: New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1978.
5. *The Journal of Parliamentary Information*, Vol. X, 1964.
6. Ranga, N.G.: *Distinguished Acquaintances*, Hyderabad, Desi Book House, 1976.
7. Constituent Assembly Debates.
8. Lok Sabha Debates
9. Rajya Sabha Debates.

PART TWO

Articles

Rajendra Babu: The Nation Builder

—*Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma**

Towards the attainment of independence and in the subsequent task of nation-building, a galaxy of our eminent leaders have made their contributions. Only a few among these stalwarts, however, had the privilege of participating both in the freedom struggle as well as in building the edifice of modern India. Sardar Patal was one such personality who had this honour for a short period. Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, however, were fortunate enough that they had the opportunity to demonstrate their acumen and render service during both these periods.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was deeply associated with culture and the people of the country. He used to associate himself with the happiness and sorrows of the people. The work done and the spirit of dedication shown by him at the time of floods in Bihar and Bengal in 1914 and the earthquake in Bihar in 1934 was an unparalleled example. In praise of his such services, Babu had written:

"No other leader has so much influence of his leadership in any province as Rajendra Babu has in his province. He became the confidant of the whole country because of the reputation and trust gained by him for his work and service during the days of earthquake. He is an emissary of peace in Bihar and I hope that through Bihar, he would become an emissary of peace for the whole of India."

* Dr. Sharma is the Vice-President of India and Chairman, Rajya Sabha.

The hopes of Bapu were, no doubt, fulfilled.

Rajendra Babu started his nation-building activities by associating himself with the problems of the common man. Later he came in contact with Bapu during the Champaran Satyagraha and his spirit of selfless service took the shape of a political philosophy and thereafter he always followed the path shown by the Mahatma. Recollecting the devotion and labour of Dr. Rajendra Prasad during Champaran Satyagraha Bapu wrote in his autobiography:

“Rajendra Babu is one of the best volunteers working with me....His affection has made me so dependent on him that without him that I cannot move even a step forward.”

On account of this feeling of deep affection, Rajendra Babu gained such profound and immense confidence of Mahatma Gandhi that he often used to say that Rajendra would even sip a cup of poison, if offered. Rajendra Babu had unflinching faith in Bapu's principle of truth and non-violence. In his presidential speech as Congress President in 1934, Dr. Rajendra Prasad had specifically said:

“There is no other principle than to have firm faith in truth and non-violence and it is the firm resolve of the people of our country that it is not the exploiters but the powers exploiting the people of the country which are to be rooted out.”

Dr. Rajendra Prasad devoted himself to the propagation of the constructive work done by Bapu in different spheres. He was a supporter of the Sarvodaya Movement. He promoted the work of Khadi and Village Industries under the auspices of his Sadaquat Ashram. About this work, Bapu wrote in *Nav-Jeevan* that:

“if the leaders of all the provinces assist me the way, Bihar Ratna, Rajendra Babu is assisting me by promoting *Charkha* and *Khadi*, I assure you that *Swarajya* (independence) will be attained soon. There

will be no need to start another movement for this purpose.”

This single example is sufficient to illustrate the dedication Rajendra Babu had for the cause of *Khadi* and *Charkha*. Rajendra Babu was the Chairman of the committee of the Constituent Assembly constituted for taking a decision about the national flag. It was due to the efforts of Rajendra Babu that it was provided in the Constitution that the cloth of the National Flag whether it was cotton, woollen or Silken—shall be handwoven Khadi made of handspun yarn. He set up Bihar Vidyapeeth to give concrete shape to Babu's concept of national education. He took keen interest in the development of Harijans and tribal people and had also been the President of Aadimjati Sewak Sangh.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was an active and fearless freedom fighter. During Champaran Satyagraha after he came into contact with Babu, he gave up his law practice to dedicate himself to the national cause. He participated actively in the Satyagraha and the Non-Co-Operation Movement of 1920 and in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1940-41 and was sent to jail many times. It is worth mentioning that he had been the President of Indian National Congress three times during the pre-independence era first in 1934, again in 1939 after Subhas Chandra Bose tendered his resignation and for the third time in 1947 when the country attained independence. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was an *Ajatshatru* i.e. a person who had no enemies. That perhaps is the reason why he proved to be a successful President of the Congress organisation. Under his leadership, the party became well organised and more powerful. Though he was active in politics, yet it were the common people who were always upper most in his mind. As Congress President, he constituted 'Kumarappa Committee' (Congress Farmers Reform Committee) aimed at removing inequalities in the matter of land holdings. The Committee's Report had far reaching effects. As Minister of Food and Agriculture, he gave the slogan of "Grow more Food" (*Adhik Ann Upjao*) which was testimony of his farsightendness.

Gifted with sharp memory, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was a talented legal luminary. The nation benefited by his talent when he was unanimously elected as the President of the Constituent Assembly of India. It is Rajendra Babu who, perhaps was mainly responsible for shaping and nourishing the concept of public welfare in our Constitution. While taking oath as the first President of India on 26 January 1950, he explained this basic concept in our Constitution in his simple and explicit words. He observed:

“The object of our Republic is that it should provide justice, liberty and equality to all its citizens and promote the sense of fraternity among the people inhabiting different States, professing several religions, speaking different languages and following various customs and sects.”

It was owing to his firm commitment to the nation that Rajendra Babu was unanimously declared the first President of independent India. He served this highest office of the nation for 12 years continuously. As President, he set many notable constitutional and democratic precedents. Serving on this highest constitutional office he not only played a role of a conscientious guardian of the Constitution but of the nation also. He had deep knowledge of Indian philosophy, culture and ethos. His views were in conformity with the ethos of our country and reflected secularism, socialism and democracy. At a reception organised by Mathura Municipal Committee on 25 December 1959, he had said:

“This is a vast country inhabited by multi-religious, multi-linguist people belonging to various provinces. Though there is diversity among them yet there is an inherent unity which has been keeping India united for centuries despite political upheavals and turmoils...we have to preserve this unity.”

For him country's interests were supreme. He would often express his views on the then prevailing problems in the country and give his impartial objective and considered advice

to Pandit Nehru and other leaders on different issues. After having read the letters of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, published recently, my estimation about him has become more firm. Pandit Nehru himself had said that "the first twelve years of our Republic will always be remembered in the history as Rajendra era." No doubt the noble deeds of Rajendra Babu will leave an indelible imprint in the history of our country.

Tribute to Rashtrapati Rajendra Prasad

— *Professor N. G. Ranga**

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of our Republic was the product of the Congress movement. He was our beloved Rashtrapati for two consecutive terms from 1952 to 1962. Though essentially a man of peace and often called “Ajat Shatru” (a man who has no enemies), he withstood the crisis which arose during the Second World War very bravely.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad who was affectionately addressed as ‘Rajen Babu’ not only by Gandhiji but by all the Congressmen, joined Mahatma Gandhi as early as in 1917 during Gandhiji’s very first struggle — popularly known as the Champaran Satyagraha — against the Imperial Government. As a trusted and devoted disciple, he stood by his mentor, Gandhiji right up to his ‘Swargarohan’.

I had the good fortune of having received his support in 1935 in my efforts to develop the All India Kisan Congress. Subsequently also, when I was the President of the All India Kisan Congress and Rajen Babu a Cabinet Minister, we continued to work together in serving the cause of Kisans. During the Second World War, when the continuation of war-time controls over food procurement had become a bitter bone of contention between Jawaharlalji and many of us in the Kisan Congress, Gandhiji supported our contention against the much-

*Professor Ranga is a Member of the Constituent Assembly and is presently a Member of the Parliament (Lok Sabha).

hated food controls. And Rajen Babu who had great loyalty for Gandhiji and immense affection for Kisans, even preferred to resign from the Cabinet on this Issue.

Rajen Babu was very much devoted to the Gandhian constructive programme and sincerely propagated Khadi and hand-spinning all over India. His work at Sadaquat Ashram and Acharya Kripalani's Khadi Centre of Meerut were equally popular. Both of them believed in self-employment of our Kisans and artisans and had appreciation for my thesis on "Economic Freedom through Self-employment".

Rajen Babu proved to be the best and softest exponent of Sardar Patel's order of discipline and Code for Congressmen. No wonder, they both came to be known as devoted disciples of Mahatma Gandhi.

It was always a wonder to many of us in the Congress movement, especially during Rajen Babu's ministerial period, as to how Gandhiji's softest warning used to be transposed into effective controls and accepted and obeyed implicitly by millions of Congressmen.

As the President of the Constituent Assembly, he used to offer his sane advice to the legal pundits to adjust their conservative approach to the revolutionary pulls from many of us. It was always a marvel to us as to how he and Dr. Ambedkar used to hammer out progressive formulae which would harmonise progressive thoughts and approaches within the constraints of historical limitations. On the whole, Rajen Babu's leadership helped in many ways not only Dr. Ambedkar but also other members of the Constituent Assembly of socialist persuasion.

When the Constituent Assembly Members assembled in the Constitution Club to informally decide as to who should be chosen as our first Rashtrapati, I still feel happy and satisfied

for playing a crucial role in supporting Rajen Babu on whose name Jawaharlalji had certain reservations. Once I listed my reasons for suggesting Rajen Babu's name for the high office, Jawaharlalji ceased to press his suggestion.

Rajen Babu, as our first Rashtrapati, laid down scrupulous yet progressive precedents of constitutional proprieties and moral conduct, which continue to serve as a beacon light to the succeeding Presidents. On occasions, when he felt that Jawaharlalji's attitude was imperious or overbearing and trespassed the well-defined norms, though not the written wordings of the Constitutional provisions, he was wise enough to avoid unpleasantness by suggesting a reference to the Supreme Court. Never did he allow any difference of opinion between him and the Prime Minister to develop into a head-on collision. His successors found those precedents as highly useful and consoling, if not inspiring.

Rajen Babu has proved to be the most agreeable colleague that Jawaharlalji could have from amongst Gandhians, while Rajaji proved to be the ablest intellectual in administration and Congress confabulations. It was indeed God's decision that both Rajen Babu and Rajaji should live as the best comrades and greatest confidants of Gandhiji.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: A Man Among Men

—S. Nijalingappa*

Even before I came into personal contact with Dr. Rajendra Prasad in 1941, he was known throughout India as almost the first among the great leaders for his sacrifice in giving up a most lucrative practice as an advocate to follow Gandhiji and participate in the first *Satyagrah* at Champaran.

The Mysore Congress, as distinguished from the Indian National Congress held its Third Annual Session in 1941 near a village near Harihar town in Chitradurga district after a very successful Forest Satyagrah begun in that district in 1939 when thousands of Satyagrahis courted imprisonment throughout the State. We were released in September 1940. The people of the district in particular and of the State in general were highly enthusiastic and wanted to make this session a historic one. I was the Chairman of the Reception Committee. We had made arrangements to hold a successful and fully representative Khadi and Village Industries Exhibition and we had one of the best. We therefore went to Gandhiji on whose enforced permission we had named our organisation as the "Mysore Congress". Mysore was then the second biggest and most advanced State and among all the States the Mysore Congress was the strongest political party. We requested Gandhiji to send us Babu Rajendra Prasad to inaugurate the Congress session

*Shri Nijalingappa is a Member of the Constituent Assembly and is former Chief Minister of Karnataka.

and to declare open the Khadi Exhibition. He was unwilling to send him but at our insistence and since we had made elaborate arrangements for the Exhibition, he consented and warned us: "I am sending to you a man among men. Take care of him. His health is not good". Accordingly, Rajen Babu came to Harihar Session, inaugurated it and was extremely happy to declare open the Exhibition. He was surprised that we could organise such a huge Exhibition and was impressed and pleased. He was also happy that the climate was warm and his troublesome Asthma did not trouble him. We also could get him enough of sugarcane juice which he liked ever so much. We requested him to tour the State also which he kindly did. That added very much to our popularity and considerably enhanced our prestige and strength for which we were grateful to him.

After I became the President of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee in 1946, I had the unique opportunity to conduct Dr. Prasad's tour in the four Kannada Districts of Bombay State viz. Dharwad, Belgaum, Bijapur and North Canara in connection with the collection of funds for Kastur Ba Trust. I was elated with the enthusiasm of the people to welcome him with open arms in such large numbers even in villages and to contribute beyond their capacity, the two inspiring factors being the purpose of the collections and the high esteem and regard they had for the collector.

In the same year, I was elected to the Constituent Assembly. Babu Rajendra Prasad was the unanimous and unquestioned choice for the Presidentship of the Constituent Assembly of India which, after three years of deliberations from November 1946 to January 1950, brought out the Constitution of India which is one of the best in the world. The Constitution which fully represents the aspirations of Free India, was hammered out by the best brains of the nation available at the time under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who piloted it. Dr. Rajendra Prasad knew India through and through and was the best disciple of Gandhiji who fully understood, as very few did, the Gandhian principles and their application to Indian problems. Dr. Prasad, as President, watched the passage of

the Constitution with complete understanding and alertness. He was one of the sharpest legal brains at the time and for always. His dignity, courtesy and impartiality were object lessons for others to follow. To look at, he was just a tall well-built Bihar rugged farmer. But his was one of the best legal brain and the shrewdest. I had many occasions to go to him both when he was presiding over the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly and later when he was the President of India for two terms. Always I found him so kind, courteous and understanding. Always I came out of those meetings satisfied and wiser than when I had gone in. They are my valued moments.

As a member of the Congress Working Committee for quite a few years from 1948 onwards till the great divide in 1969 (except for two years), I had the occasion to be associated with all the leaders of the Congress. The impression of the four foremost leaders has been that Gandhiji was revered, Sardar was feared though unnecessarily, Nehru was loved and Rajendra Prasad was respected. One occasion on which Rajendra Prasad lost his patience was when the question of fixing the disputed boundary between Bengal and Bihar was being discussed. There was a difference of opinion and Sardar Patel took a particular view and Rajendra Prasad took another view. My view is that Rajendra Prasad was right. When after a good deal of discussion, his opinion was not accepted he lost his patience and angrily expressed: "If that is so it will come to the knife". The entire Committee, as words came so strongly from the mouth of Rajen Babu, kept absolutely silent for quite a time and the subject was dropped. I believe he had his way.

Another time when he took a strong view was when the matter of double member constituencies was discussed, according to which a Scheduled Caste candidate could only stand when coupled with a non-scheduled caste candidate. When during the discussions in the Working Committee this matter came up, Babu Rajendra Prasad made out a strong case against this double member constituencies arguing: how long do we want these unfortunate people to be hanging on to

the coat tails of the other communities. We may give them liberty to stand on their own legs and fight out. He had his way.

After the Constitution was accepted and India became a Republic and Lok Sabha elected, the next question was the election of the President of India. The Indian National Congress was naturally the ruling party and Pandit Nehru the Prime Minister of India.

The Congress Party in Parliament after acceptance of the Constitution had to choose the President of India. In the party meeting called for the purpose, the Prime Minister Pandit Nehru took us by surprise by suggesting the name of Rajaji (Sri C. Rajagopalachari) and argued for about 45 minutes eulogising the fitness of Rajaji for the high office. But almost every one proposed Dr. Rajendra Prasad as the only man at the time fit for the great office considering all the circumstances. Panditji knew how and when to take a defeat. I have a shrewd suspicion that all was not well between the two leaders. That perhaps continued till Dr. Rajendra Prasad's death.

After the first term of Presidentship was over, the Congress Party had to choose a President. I believe there were differences between Nehru and Rajaji and Panditji this time opted not for Rajaji but for Dr. Radhakrishnan and appealed to members. Then again the general feeling of the members that they would not tolerate any body else till Rajendra Prasad was alive was made clear. Dr. Prasad was for the second time elected as enthusiastically as on the first occasion. During the small period of time that is given for filing nominations etc., I went to Dr. Prasad and pressed him that on no account should he withdraw. He was even unwilling to file nomination but was compelled to do so due to pressure of friends and admirers. He told me that he was not willing and wanted to retire. But I and many others pressed him. In the meanwhile Pandit Nehru also seemed to have approached him. What happened between them we do not know. Those were rumours

Another occasion which I can never forget is when linguistic States were constituted after Parliament passed the States Re-

organisation Bill in 1956. He came to Bangalore to inaugurate the new Karnataka State when I became the first Chief Minister of the State and the Mysore Maharaja Sri Jayachamaraja Wodiyar was appointed as the Governor of the State. It is my feeling the State began under the best auspices with his blessings.

As President of India, his services as such cannot be forgotten and are solid facts of history. He laid firm foundations for future presidents as to the position the President should occupy according to the Constitution. He upheld the dignity and authority of the high office though there were certain differences between him and the Prime Minister.

The next President after Dr. Prasad could only be Dr. Radhakrishnan who was the choice and he was rightly elected. It was the best choice and Dr. Radhakrishnan brought as much credit to the great office as did his predecessor, Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Dr. Prasad as was expected, retired to his Sadaquat Ashram and led his usual simple and noble life till his last day. He was one of the greatest leaders of the struggle for freedom launched under Gandhiji. Few understood and followed Gandhiji as well as he did.

Babu Rajendra Prasad's life was nobly lived. He is a great son of India. As Gandhiji said he was a "MAN AMONG MEN".

Rajen Babu*Dr. Bal Ram Jakhar**

Born in an obscure village of Bihar, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was an embodiment of simplicity, humility and Gandhian values and personification of all that is best in our culture. Emerging from the historic soil of Magadh, he rose to become one of the front-ranking leaders of India's independence movement and later the first President of our Republic.

Rajen Babu, as he was affectionately called, along with Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel, constituted the holy trinity that characterised the Gandhian leadership of our freedom struggle. His devotion and sacrifice for the cause of India's freedom, fought under the leadership of Gandhiji, was exemplary. He was perhaps the most faithful and devoted disciple of Gandhiji which is evident from what Bapu himself had once observed:

"There is at least one man who would not hesitate to take the cup of poison from my hands."

Even as a student of Calcutta University as early as in 1908, Rajen Babu had organised Bihari Students' Conference — the first of its kind in those days in the whole of India. The importance of this organisation consisted in the fact that the entire political leadership of Bihar in the following decade emerged mainly from this organisation. This was the first manifestation of the organisational skill of Rajen Babu who, as the years rolled by, combined in himself the fine qualities of a

* Dr. Jakhar is a former Speaker of Lok Sabha.

statesman, a scholar, a historian, an educationist, a social reformer and, above all, a constructive thinker and philosopher.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad guided the destiny of the country very ably particularly during the period immediately before and soon after the attainment of independence. During the freedom struggle, he was elected President of the Congress Party on as many as three occasions. When the Constituent Assembly, formed in 1946, aimed at framing a Constitution for India, Rajen Babu was elected its President. In 1950 he became the first President of the Republic and continued to adorn this august office for a period of 13 long years till 1962.

The stewardship of Constituent Assembly stands out as a shining example of his high qualities. As its President, he guided, controlled and regulated its proceedings with dexterity, utmost patience and farsight. Not only that no one had ever any sense of grievance or reservation about the regulation of proceedings but all felt that the discussions were free and frank. During the very first session of the Constituent Assembly, he had announced that though the Assembly was born under limitations, it would outgrow and function as a sovereign body recognising no outside authority. He not only helped in the birth of Indian Republic, he nursed it too like a true mother in its formative years, with abundant affection and pride.

In his closing remarks as President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajen Babu had observed:

“Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend upon the way in which the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it... we have communal differences, caste differences, language differences, provincial differences and so forth. It requires men of strong character, men of vision, men who will not sacrifice the

interest of the country at large for the sake of smaller groups and areas and who will rise over the prejudices which are born of these differences. We can only hope that the country will throw up such men in abundance."

As occupant of the office of the President of India, he won over everybody by his lofty idealism, sincerity of purpose and integrity of character. Though, according to the scheme of the Constitution he was only a titular head, he did exercise his moderating influence and moulded governmental policies and actions silently and unobtrusively, upholding always the dignity of the high office that he held.

The services rendered and contributions made by Rajen Babu to India's political and public life have been outstanding. His qualities of head and heart will always be remembered by all, particularly by those who had occasion to cherish his noble company. He was goodness and politeness personified. In him were tempered "power with wisdom and prestige with modesty." He was a man of incisive intellect, phenomenal memory, innate integrity and purity of character, and utmost humility and devotion. Above all, he was a true lover of humanity. All these qualities mark him out as a distinct and towering personality. He was indeed a *Rajrishi* and a *Ajatshatru*. Recalling his nearly five decades of association with Rajen Babu, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had once observed:

"From an ordinary status he rose to the highest office in India and yet it did not affect his mode of living. He was a great soul and yet so simple and humble. He set a paradigm which has raised the dignity and honour of India... In fact, he had become the symbol of India."

Any discussion about the multi-faceted personality of Rajen Babu would be incomplete without referring to his beliefs and attitude towards religion and the role it played in society. Rajen Babu was in fact an orthodox Hindu and a deeply religious man. But he was never carried away by the outward forms and rituals of religions. To him the basis of religious belief was not material but spiritual in nature. He held that the finer form of

religion was concerned with man's inner experiences which were also responsible for the birth of religious belief in human mind. Its other form, on the other hand, was seen in one's behaviour and actions in every-day life. In a wider sense, religion consisted of those beliefs and ideas which held the key to the mysteries of the origin of life and the relationship between man and the Supreme Being. In his view, it was religion or *dharma* which supplied the real basis for peace of the great seers. It was also the ultimate goal of all literary endeavour. Religion thus, he emphasised, was not only essential but inevitable for man as an individual and as a member of the society.

Rajen Babu took pride in the fact that the fundamental right of freedom of religion, belief faith and worship for all the citizens had been incorporated in the Constitution of India. It was because our ancestors the saints and *faqirs* and other religious leaders right from the dawn of history had placed before as the ideals of tolerance, faith and respect for all religions. Some people often raise the question that because we are a secular state, we do not believe in religion or spiritual values. To them he would say "Far from being so it really means that in this country all are free to profess or preach the faith of their liking and that we wish well of all religions and want them to develop in their own way without let or hindrance."

Being an intensely religious man, Rajen Babu would not however, like to place constraints on the following of one's religious belief in the way he liked. He clarified this in the following words:

"It does not mean that man should consider himself free from all those injunctions and social restraints which have been responsible since the earliest times for organised and regulated life and which are inevitably necessary for the development of his individuality and the evolution of the ideal social order. It means that no individual or society should dominate other individuals or societies by sup^{want}planting them and that everyone must have full scope

of development. This will be possible only when every individual and every society shows respect for the feelings and interests of others. Suppression of others must not be considered merely as against principles of fairplay but also as incompatible with one's own self-interest. Thus alone can the feeling of genuine love and tolerance be brought about without which true peace and happiness of the individual and the society will ever remain a mirage."

Rajen Babu was fully conscious of the diversity in India. He knew that we in India have as many as 15-16 principal spoken languages. In addition, there are a large number of dialects prevalent in large tracts of the country. There is no faith in the world which is not followed by millions in our country. Our culture is, as he put it, "a composite culture which has been influenced by all with whom this country came into contact. This country has never shut its doors against foreigners: In our entire history we have never carried out any aggressive war. We have suffered from invasions but never ourselves invaded any other country." While opening the Martyrs' Column in Trivandrum on 14 August, 1957 Rajen Babu had said:

"India is a conglomeration of various kinds of cultures, of languages, of religions, of mode of living and it has, running through all these apparent diversities a unity which supersedes all and which has continued in spite of political disunity, in spite of all kinds of difficulties which have been showered upon us by nature and by man. It is not surprising that we have such diversities in a big country like India. If you only remember that our population, as it is today, is almost equal to the population of the whole of Europe minus Russia, you can understand the significance of this diversity as well as of this unity. In Europe there are so many countries which are divided from one another and on the other hand, we have not had a 100-year or a 30-year or even a 7-year war. We fought between ourselves occasionally but these never proved to be as devastating as the wars of Europe and in spite of political division, the cultural life of the people continued

uninterrupted and without any kind of interference. This great unity has been possible because our people have from time immemorial, accepted the principle of 'live and let live' of mutual respect and tolerance, of what may be called co-existence in modern language."

Referring to the people in the ancient times he said that they were known for their moderation and equanimity. They did not neglect the spiritual aspect of life in the face of the attractions of material prosperity nor did they ignore worldly life in order to administer their spiritual needs. They aimed at evolving a synthesis of these two aspects of life and in their efforts, they were not altogether unsuccessful. These are prophetic words indeed. Would it not therefore be desirable to revive that sense of harmony and synthesis so that we may be able to build a prosperous India and at the same time raise the moral standard of our people?

On another occasion, Rajen Babu had said that it was the feeling of tolerance for the views of others which flowered in our country into the various systems of thought and philosophy, which were not always in conformity with one another, but logically and directly opposed to one another in many respects. "Not only did we recognize the founders of these various schools as *rishis*, but some times we apothothesized them.... We have a marvellous example of a synthesis when Buddhism as a church is not to be found in modern India, but the Lord teaching has become a part and parcel of the life and make-up of every Hindu." He added: "Our present day political *Panchsheel* is a natural growth from this historic and cultural background and with us, it is not a mere formula but an item of active faith as also an essential part of our present-day interest, which all combine to dictate to us the doctrine of co-existence."

Rajen Babu was a great patriot, a *Rajrishi* in the true sense. He said:

"We want our own prosperity but not at the expense of the prosperity of others; we want our own rise but we do not want anyone to be done away with before we want to

rise; we want to progress, but not by aggression; we want to be free and we want at the same time to ensure freedom to everyone else. That is the meaning of the principle of *Ahimsa* on which our whole life and culture have been based and which have been the greatest contribution, if I may say so, to political thought, to religious thought, to moral thought, to the world that any nation has made."

“Deshratna” Dr. Rajendra Prasad: A Rare Example of Truth and Simplicity

—*Bhagwat Jha Azad**

It is the intellectual and cultural heritage which is more important than the material assets not only for a country but for the world also. In this context, memory of the first President of the Republic of India, evoked the constructive approach adopted by Deshratna, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, whose personality embodied finer values of service, dedication and modesty. Our country has been very fortunate in the sense that her people got invaluable guidance of an outstanding personality like Dr. Rajendra Prasad in their freedom struggle. Our country has providential blessings to have Dr. Rajendra Prasad as the first president. Endowed with the outstanding qualities of head and heart, he shaped the destiny of this nation for about twelve years.

Dr. Prasad was truly an embodiment of noble qualities which form the essence of Indian culture—truth simplicity and generosity. Mahadevi Verma, a great poetess, while recalling his simplicity had said:

“Rajendra Babu was a true Indian not only by his appearance but also by his personality. Therefore, any person who saw him for the first time, felt that he had seen the same person somewhere else also. By his appearance and dress, he represented an ordinary Indian or an Indian farmer. But his sensitivity combined with his talents and

* Shri Azad is a former Union Minister and former Chief Minister of Bihar.

sharp intelligence distinguished him from ordinary persons. A broad outlook is a necessary concomitant for simplicity”.

Today, many words, like “Neta, Sewa” etc. are losing their well-defined significance. In view of the cherished basic values of ancient India, a Neta can only be a person who possesses a personality reflecting a true Indian. As a true nationalist, he should have respect and love for his motherland, having full natural resources. (*Sujalam Sufalam Shasya Shyamla Mataram*).

Dr. Prasad played a historic and multi-dimensional role in the nation-building process. When mother India expected her sons to make sacrifices and render service for her, Dr. Prasad considered it his sacred duty to serve the nation and made supreme efforts in that regard. The personality and nature of Dr. Prasad can be gauged by the contribution he made in framing the Constitution of India. In the Presidential addresses, he always called upon the people to follow the values of non-violence, peace and friendship etc. He was the first person to appeal from the holy land of Buddha and Ashoka, to free the humanity from the fear of destruction, jealousy and terror and make this planet free of violence so that it becomes a beautiful place to live in. A harbinger of peace, Dr. Prasad appealed to all the big powers of the world to go in for unilateral disarmament of nuclear arms.

Rajendra Babu was a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi and had successfully tread the path of truth and non-violence throughout his life. Gandhiji was of the view that the freedom attained by adopting violence means cannot be a real or stable freedom. Non-violence means love for the entire humanity. Dwelling on the greatness of truth, Mahatmaji had said: “If a potter gives an ugly shape to a pitcher, then who is at fault? The pitcher or the potter? A Satyagrahi must have the backing of the power of truth”. Keeping in mind the words of Bapuji, Dr. Prasad accorded top priority to the values of truth, non-violence and love, not only as a freedom fighter but also as a President, as a distinguished Indian and as one of the framers of the Constitution of India. If we minutely analyse the constitutional

provisions, we will find that in the Constitution of India, the main emphasis has been laid on freedom and dignity of man and fraternity. In fact, such sublime thoughts—the very essence of democracy—were emphasised by Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

As a great apostle of world peace and a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi Dr. Prasad appealed to all sections of the people of this country as well as of the world to desist from violence, war and ill-will and create an atmosphere congenial for peace, love and friendship.

He made a historical proposal to big powers of the world to begin unilateral disarmament in order to save the world from the holocaust of war. This humane proposal shows how much respect Dr. Rajendra Prasad had for the values of peace and non-violence. Non-violence, no doubt, is rarely an unailing and powerful weapon. About non-violence Bapuji had said that next to truth, non-violence is the most-potent force, which never fails. On the other hand, violent means only appear to be successful. It was because of this sublime outlook that Dr. Rajendra Babu always remained associated with his Guru Mahatma Gandhi and preferred truth over power.

Rajendra Babu was an ideal man of simple living and high thinking. His whole life is worth emulating. His straightforwardness, simplicity and politeness is clearly reflected in his thinking, in his speeches and in his actions. Every person, who came into his contact, was influenced by his towering personality and got inspiration from him to rise above their narrow outlook and petty feelings. Even in his national life, Rajendra Babu was not only an "Ajatshatru" (one who has no enemy) but also a person full of love and affection. If there is any standard to measure the national character, we can find the highest standard in Dr. Rajendra Prasad. In the present atmosphere, when character assassination, rude behaviour, falsehood and mutual jealousy have become the order of the day, the image of Rajendra Babu appears like a beacon light in our memory. Today, our country is facing a number of crises and above all is the crisis of character. A developing country like India undoubtedly is in great need of super thermal power

stations, factories, high speed vehicles, computers and machines capable of providing speedy solutions to intricate problems. But, more important is that the operators of these machines and equipments should be imbued with human qualities and human approach. Thus, today India needs a more strong generation of citizens with high character. Rajendra Babu was a symbol of such a character, truthfulness and simplicity. Rajendra Babu will ever remain on a high pedestal as a living legend of human and spiritual values.

A Great President of a Great Country

— R. Ramanathan Chettiar*

At the All India Agricultural Economic Conference presided over by Rajendra Prasad, held in Madras towards the end of 1949, I, as one who was associated with its Reception Committee made acquaintance with the great personality that Dr. Rajendra Prasad was and in fact worked with him for a few weeks. I was at that time the Sheriff of Madras. Later on, I was Mayor of Madras in 1951, I went to New Delhi and invited him to accept my humble invitation to attend a Reception at the Ripon Buildings, Madras during one of his visits to Madras as President of India. He told me that the function must be held in an open space, where people could gather and meet him. When I suggested about a dance performance, he told me that the young artists should be totally non-professional. This I was able to arrange with the help of some of my friends.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad accompanied by Mr. P.S.Kumaraswamy Raja, Chief Minister of Madras, arrived at the Ripon Buildings to have tea with me, the Councillors of the Corporation and other high dignitaries of Madras. Two D.M.K. Councillors sought permission to abstain themselves from the function in order to avoid embarrassment to the President, for their party had desired to show Black Flags to the President, because in the Constituent Assembly of which he was the President, had passed a Resolution making Hindi as the National language. I took the President in the open car to the Corporation's Stadium where a huge crowd of more than 20,000 had assembled to

*Shri Chettiar is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

accord him reception. The President was kind enough to present mementoes on behalf of the Corporation to the young artists in appreciation of their Bharat Natyam performance.

Being a member of Lok Sabha during the second term of Dr. Rajendra Prasad's Presidentship (1957-1962), I occasionally used to meet him. He was kind to me. He was a great scholar and acquitted himself as a great President of a great country. In 1962 on the occasion of his departure after laying down office to his home town, Patna by special train, I was one of those present at the New Delhi Railway Station to bid him farewell. It was indeed a touching scene.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Childhood and Village life

— Valmiki Chowdhary*

Rajendra Prasad's great grand-father had two sons. Chaudhur Lal was the elder one and Mishri Lal was the younger. Mishri Lal had only one child namely Mahadeo Sahai. Mahadeo Sahai was Rajendra Prasad's father.

Mahadeo Sahai had three daughters and two sons. The eldest was, daughter-Bhagwati Devi, the second was Anarkali and the third, who was also a daughter passed away in her childhood. Next was Mahendra Prasad and Rajendra Prasad was the youngest among them.

Chaudhur Lal was Dewan of the Hathua State. The King of Hathua, Rajendra Prasad Sahi used to pay respects to Dewan Chaudhur Lal like his father used to. So much so that he did not even touch *Hukkah* in his presence. In case he had been smoking *Hukkah* and he came to know the Dewanji was expected he would immediately order that the *Hukkah* be removed from there. He would ask him respectfully to be seated. He used to seek his advice in all matters, more particularly those connected with functions of the State.

Mishri Lal who was the grand-father of Rajendra Prasad was a *Vaidaya* and a man of benevolent nature. He used to distribute medicines in the village. He had a very good knowledge of the herbs. He would grind the herbs and prepare

*Shri Choudhary is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha). He also served as Private Secretary to Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

medicines from them at his own house. The patients from his village as also from neighbouring villages often visited him. He would grant equal attention to all. He would give medicines to poor persons free of charge and whosoever came to him invariably got cured.

Mahadeo Sahai, the only child of Mishri Lal, was a very healthy and a man of character and sobriety. He would take pleasure in helping the poor and destitutes. He would encourage the youngmen from his village as well as from neighbouring villages to learn wrestling, perform physical exercises with club and do body building.

Mahadeo Sahai, the father of Rajendra Prasad, was a worldly wise man. He was very fond of horticulture. The trees planted by him are still bearing fruit. He earned good reputation for the family by dint of his hard work, he enriched the family with wealth, land and farming and exerted all his efforts towards making the family an ideal.

Rajendra Prasad's sister Bhagwati Devi was elder to him by 15 years. She was brought up with love and affection and her marriage was performed with great pomp and show since this was first marriage of a child in Mahadeo Sahai's family. But, unfortunately, Smt. Bhagwati Devi was widowed at the age of 15. It was a serious jolt to the family.

After becoming a widow, she came back to stay with her parents. She used to spend her time in the worship of God, undertaking fasts and pilgrimage. Throughout her life, Bhagwati Devi was given due regard in the family. Being eldest child of the family, she lived there like head of the family. No body ever questioned her authority or dared disobey her.

A widow was held in high esteem in the family of Rajendra Prasad. So there was no lack of regard and honour of Bhagwati Devi despite her being a widow, rather her prestige was maintained with other members of the family.

When Rajendra Prasad became the President of India,

Bhagwati Devi also moved into Rashtrapati Bhawan. She lived there till her demise. On the morning of 26 January, 1956, she passed away.

The purpose of giving details about the story of Bhagwati Devi is to show that a widow in the family of Rajendra Prasad was not treated in the manner as is normally done in society. In a Hindu family, particularly in a conservative Sanatanist family, a widow has to bear great insults and mental agony at every step. On auspicious occasions her presence is treated as ominous but in the family of Rajendra Prasad, the widow daughter was given due regard. She was given so much respect that she forgot the agony of her widowhood.

Mahadeo Sahai had two sons. Mahendra Prasad was the elder and Rajendra Prasad was the younger. Mahendra Prasad and Rajendra Prasad were ideal brothers. Mahendra Prasad was 8 years older than Rajendra Prasad. In fact Mahendra Prasad was the guardian of Rajendra Prasad. Rajendra Prasad always sought advice and approval of his elder brother Mahendra Prasad on every matter. So much so that when if Rajendra Prasad got double promotion after qualifying his examination, he did not accept it without seeking the permission of his elder brother. Rajendra Prasad never felt the necessity to make any demand. His elder brother always saw to it that he got every little thing without asking. He used to get new clothes for Rajendra Prasad on every festival. An attendant was attached with him from his student life onwards to ensure that he got his food on time and properly looked after. Rajendra Prasad did not bear the responsibility of his own family till the death of Mahendra Prasad. Mahendra Prasad wanted that his brother devoted his time to studies and then to legal practice. Thereafter when he look to public service his brother took more care to see that all his needs were fulfilled and he had not to worry for anything.

Rajendra Prasad used to regard such a noble brother as his father. He never did anything without seeking the approval of his brother. Rajendra Prasad wrote his autobiography and dedicated it to his brother, Mahendra Prasad. His brother died

in 1934. Only after his death, did Rajendra Prasad came to know as to how much land and other property the family owned. It was only after his brother's demise that Rajendra Prasad became aware of the family's debt.

Childhood and Primary education

Rajendra Prasad was born on the Purnima of Agrahayana in 1941 Vikram Era, i.e. 3 December, 1884 in the village Zeradei of district Saran. At that time nobody could predict that the child born in this backward village would be an intellectual giant and would be the recipient of the country's top most honour, the 'Bharat Ratna' and would play a leading role in the freedom movement, and would become the first President of the Republic of India—a vast country with numerous communities and languages.

Rajendra Prasad started his education in Urdu and persian languages, according to the prevailing practice at that time. A Muslim teacher *Maulvi* would coach him at home. Arrangements for board and lodging for the *Maulvi Sahib* were made at the home itself. He lived in an outer room adjacent to the main house. In front of this room there was a verandah which was used as '*Maktab*'. It relates to the period, 1889-90.

Until the age of eight years, Rajendra Prasad received education from *Maulvi Sahib* at his home. At that time neither the teachers were greedy nor were the students ill-mannered. Misbehaviour was not condoned then. At that time people held the elders and teachers in high esteem.

Rajendra Prasad, alongwith his two companions, used to attend the class early in the morning. They used to keep their books on the desk and learnt their lessons earnestly. *Maulvi Sahib* used to ask the pupils to repeat the previous day's lesson and then write it down. Only after conviction that the students had learnt the previous day's lesson to his satisfaction, would he, take up the next lesson.

Rajendra Prasad was always the first one to come to the class room. He used to repeat the previous day's lesson's orally and in writing. Therefore, he used to be the first student

to get the next lesson and he used to start memorising the same immediately.

Besides Urdu-Persian, Rajendra Prasad also learnt counting, multiplication tables, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division at the '*Maktab*'. He remained in the village until the age of eight years and was coached by *Maulvi Sahib*.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are known as three-R's in educational parlance. These three-R's are the foundation stones of education. If a student, without any mental tension, learns correctly to read, write, the four basic things (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) of arithmetic, his foundation of education gets concretised.

One of the characteristics of education in '*Maktab*' was that major emphasis was laid on repetition of the lessons and learning them by heart. It is easy to memorise a lesson by repeating it several times.

Rajendra Prasad was a simple, intelligent and a shy boy. At the age of eight, he left Zeradei for the first time for Chhapra for getting education. It was a new experience for him. Rajendra Prasad had mentioned this even in nostalgic touching and innocent way in his autobiography.

Rajendra Prasad in his autobiography had written that a small house was taken on rent in Chhapra for a monthly rent of rupees three or four. His brother (Mahendra Prasad) also lived there with a servant, who would prepare their meals. Initially, a teacher was engaged for keeping a watch over his brother. But when he (Rajendra Prasad) shifted there, no one else except his brother was there. Some days after his arrival in Chhapra, he was enrolled in the district school in the eighth standard which was the primary standard in those days. He started his education with the Roman and Devnagari alphabets. His brother was promoted from second standard for the entrance class. No tutor was engaged for him. If he wanted to inquire anything, other than whatever was taught in the school, he would ask his brother. Since a tutor was not engaged at home, he soon got into the habit of concentrating on his school

lessons. This inculcated self-confidence in him from the beginning itself. At the end of the year, his brother was busy preparing for the Entrance Examination and he was preparing for his annual examination. He secured a good position in the examination. He obtained a first division with very high marks and the Headmaster recommended a double promotion for him. As a result, he bypassed one class. At that point of time, he was about ten years old.

Rajendra Prasad secured maximum marks and got double promotions from the very first year in the school. It is true that coming events cast their shadows before hand.

Rajendra Prasad was living in Chhapra alongwith his elder brother Mahendra Prasad in a small rented house. After two years stay at Chhapra, his elder brother went to Patna for further studies, after passing his Entrance examination. After his brother went to Patna, he also shifted there. He was enrolled in the T.K. Ghosh Academy there. Patna is a bigger city than Chhapra. The number of students was also more there. Rajendra Prasad felt that he would have to work hard to get ahead of his classmates because he had passed two classes in one year at Chhapra. No tutor was engaged for him at Patna also. He tried to maintain his position in the school by self-study alone.

He acquired a good habit of studying since his childhood. He memorised his entire school lessons at home daily. He used to learn his lesson in such a manner that led to easy memorisation. Not only this, he used to prepare the lessons in advance at home which were to be taught the next day. He continued this practice in Patna also. It had paid dividends and he always stood first in his class.

Two conclusions can be drawn from his student life in Chhapra. Firstly, he believed in hard work without caring for the result and secondly he was devoted to his brother and regarded him as his guardian.

He had hardly studied for two years in T.K. Ghosh Academy when his elder brother Mahendra Prasad had to leave for

Calcutta after having passed his F.A. Examination. It was not possible for Rajendra Prasad at that time to go to Calcutta. It was also not considered proper to leave him alone in Patna. He got admission in Hathua High School, but due to lack of proper arrangements of studies in Hathua, he left it. After six months, he got himself admitted in the fourth class in the Chhapra District school. The number of students in Chhapra District school was very large. The class fourth particularly, had three sections due to the large number of students. Rajendra Prasad was enrolled in Section A. Shri Rasik Lal, Bengali teacher was his class teacher. He was very much impressed by his intelligence. One day, he told him that if he maintained his performance, then his only competitor would be Ramanugrah. Rajendra Prasad alluding to it in his autobiography had observed: "I do not know why he had said so but it so happened that his forecast proved true in a period of two-three years". When both Rajendra Prasad and Ramanugrah appeared in the examination, Rajendra Prasad stood first and Ramanugrah stood second. When the annual examination of class fourth was going on plague broke out in epidemic form in Chhapra. After taking his examination for two days Rajendra Prasad fell ill and suffered from high fever. He was shifted to his village zeradei for two months. As a result his name was struck off the rolls in the school and his name was not sent up for entrance examination. But after he was enrolled again, it was discovered that the marks secured by him, entitled him for the 'sent up'. He was therefore, granted the permission to appear in the entrance examination.

Rural life

Rajendra Prasad spent his early childhood in a family having faith in *Snatan Dharma*. He slept with his mother till the age of eight. He used to listen to the Ramayana from his mother at 4 o'clock in morning. His mother and grand-mother would sing 'prabhati' which he always listened with utmost interest. The stories from Ramayana, 'Prabhati' and devotional songs and the belief of the family in fasts and rituals had a lasting influence on the mind of Rajendra Prasad. The habit cultivated

by him in childhood of listening attentively and assimilating it proved helpful to him in his student life, legal profession and public life.

Rajendra Prasad was greatly influenced by rural life. He was of the opinion that villages were capable of meeting all the requirements of life and society and considered them self-contained units. He had drawn a rosy picture of the villages in his autobiography. In those days the life in a village was more simple than today. Zeradei and Jamapur were two villages but both the villages were so mixed up that it was difficult to say where Zeradei ended and Jamapur began. Both the villages could be considered as one with regard to population. People of all communities resided in both the villages. The combined population of these villages was more than two thousand. During those days also, all the things which are generally available in the villages were there. Now some new shops have been opened, where Pan-Beedis are also available which were not available earlier, although black tobacco and Khaini were used to be sold. There were good cloth shops, from where persons of other villages and some outside traders used to buy cloth. All the commodities like rice, pulses, flour, spices, salt, oil etc. were sold there and some small medicine shops were also there, where Harar-Hahera Pipal etc. and many herbs were available. So far as I remember, sweetmeat shops were not there. People of Koiri castes were living in large number in the village, so vegetables were available in abundance. Population of Ahirs was less but in the surrounding villages their population was quite large. So curd and milk was also available. The use of charkha was very common. There was also a weaver's basti in the village who used to weave the yarn given to them. Banglemen used to make bangles. General merchants used to sell small articles like beedi, etc. by bringing them from outside and some of these were made by them. Muslim population consisted of banglemen, general merchants, masons, tailors and weavers. Sheiks or Syeds also lived there. Population of Hindus consisted of Brahmins, Rajputs, Bhumiars, Kayasth, Koiri, Kurmi, Kamkar, Turha, Gaur, Dome, Chamar, Dusadh etc.

I think, the maximum population was of Rajputs. Of these some belonged to the class of Zamindars and were considered to be men belonging to noble family and some of them were ordinary farmers. In the village Zeradei itself, there were five Kayastha families, out of which three were related to us and the other two had settled from outside.

Generally, everything was available in the village itself, and therefore, people rarely went out of the village for buying. Bazars were also held in the village twice a week, where shopkeepers of nearby villages would also take part by bringing their articles on their heads or on bullock carts or on horse back etc. Sweetmeat shops were also there and those who desired could purchase fish or meat.

A man alongwith a bundle of small books of Persian language and one or two bottles of ink used to visit '*Maulvi Sahib*' once in two or four months. On his arrival, we, the children would become very happy. Sometimes during winter, when some general merchants would come to sell oranges and lemons in a basket, then also our joy knew no bounds.

There were two small '*maths*' in the village where Sadhus used to live. The people of the village had made arrangements for their needs and the Sadhus performed '*aarty*' (in the morning and in the evening). At the time of '*aarty*' few people would also assemble there. Sometimes we would also go there and Babaji would give '*Tulsi-Jal Prasad*'. On the occasion of Ramnavmi and in particularly Janmashtmi, preparations were made in the '*math*'. All the children used to decorate '*Sinhasan*' with buntings and flower papers and took part in the celebrations, kept fast and on day of '*Dadhi Kando*' we rubbed curd and turmeric on each other. Generally, every year during the month of Kartik some Pandit would come for one and a half month or so to recite Ramayana, the Bhagwat or some other Purana. On the last day of ceremony (*Punnahuti*) all the people of village would assemble to make offerings. My family used to offer more as we were considered to be the richest. Quite often '*Katha*' used to be read in our house and we used to incur all the expenses in this connection. When *Panchayati-Katha* was

organised in the village, all the people of the village would provide food for the Panditji by turns. My family also used to take part in it. We children would hardly listen to the 'Katha' but when the 'aarty' was performed, we would be awakened for the 'Prasad'.

Ramleela was another source of education and entertainment. A troupe used to come to perform Ramleela and there would be great hustle and bustle for 15 to 20 days. Ramleela was performed sometimes at Jamapur and sometimes at Zeradei. The Leela was also strange, the persons performing the role of Ram, Laxman etc. were not much educated. The dialogues did not provide any entertainment because they were spoken by some persons and were repeated by the characters. It was the performance of the actors and particularly the fighting scenes which provided entertainment. On the day of the coronation, the people of village would offer 'Puja' at the feet of Ramji in the form of meals and cash. The actors performing the role of Ram, Laxman and Janaki would be taken to the houses of those big people, whose ladies could not see the 'Leela' due to the pardah system. There they were worshipped and money was offered to them.

I had been influenced by the lessons of Ramayana very much since childhood. Very few educated people were there in the village. No primary or other school was there in the village at that point of time. *Maulvi Sahib* who used to teach us would receive three or four rupees per month and meals per day. There was another Muslim in the village who was julaha by caste and knew how to write 'Kaithi'. He also knew 'Mudkatti' arithmetic which included the calculation of weights etc. and measurement of land. He opened a school where some boys of the village used to study.

Every day in the evening, people would gather either in 'math' or in front of any house and a person would recite couplets from Ramcharit Manas and others would repeat the same while playing on 'Jhal' and 'Dholak' musical instruments. It was obligatory on the part of audience to repeat a portion of

prayer '*Vandana*' recited in the beginning of such a devotional recitation. Thus a number of illiterate persons in the village used to learn by heart many couplets of Ramayan, particularly couplets of its prayer and were able to quote them at appropriate occasions.

Holi used to be the most famous festival. The rich and the poor equally participated in it. People would sing Holi songs from the day of Basant Panchami. In rural language it was called "*Tal Uthana*". From Basant Panchami to the actual day of Holi, people used to gather here and there with '*Jha!*' and '*Dholak*' big and small drums and sing Holi songs.

Diwali was also celebrated with enthusiasm. A few days before it, people used to clean their houses. Walls were smeared with dung etc. and wooden pillars and doors were coated with oil. In those days kerosene oil was not used probably it was not available then. Only mustard, linseed or castor oil was used in lamps etc. On the occasion of Diwali, the rich and the poor, illuminated their houses by lighting small earthen lamps.

The atmosphere of the village used to remain religious by Katha-Vachan, Ramliila, Ramayan Path and celebrations of festivals. Besides, this there was a tradition of *Taajiyas* procession during *Muharram*. Both Hindus and Muslims used to participate in it. Only few Hindus in Zeradei and Jamapur were rich and prosperous and so their *Taajiyas* used to be bigger and more decorative in comparison to that of the poor Muslims. During *Muharram* wielding of clubs, sticks and lathis, etc. were demonstrated daily and on the day of '*Pahlam*' there used to be a big gathering. *Taajiyas* of different villages were taken to '*Karbala*' with the slogans of '*Ya Ali or Imani*' being raised on the way and the games of '*Gadkas*' were demonstrated. There used to be no feeling of being a Hindu or Muslim. '*Shirni*' and '*Tichauri*' (soaked rice and Gur) were distributed. All used to take it and eat it.

Hindus used to take part in *Muharram* and similarly Muslims also took part in the Holi celebrations. On the occasion of

Dussehra, Diwali and Holi festivals, we children, used to read to our elders the 'Idi' prepared by *Maulvi Sahib* and the money received from them was given to *Maulvi Sahib*.

Litigation was very rare in villages in those days. Disputes, if any, were settled by the 'Panchas' of the village. The matter which was considered not fit to be decided by the Panchas, was presented to my grand-father or uncle. They too joined the panchayat to get the dispute settled.

A remarkable event of the family life of Rajendra Prasad in worth mentioning. He writes in his autobiography "I was married when I was reading in Class Vth or in VIth*". He was married to Rajwanshi Devi at the age of twelve in 1896. At that point of time, age factor was no consideration for purpose of marriage. He was blessed with two sons, Mrityunjay Prasad in 1906 and Dhananjay Prasad in 1909.

When Rajendra Prasad was studying in Chhapra, Pandit Vikramaditya Mishra was his local guardian. He was a staunch follower of Sanatan Dharma. He used to take bath in the river Saryu daily. After performing his daily rituals in a nearby Thakurbari, he would cook his own meals. When at leisure, he would narrate stories to Rajendra Prasad from Ramayana, Mahabharat and certain other religious books. Dr. Rajendra Prasad had made a mention of, the healthy impact of Pandit Vikramaditya Mishra, in his autobiography "his company had left on me and other boys a very good impact, as expected".

*At that point of time the order of classes just the opposite of what is at present. Eighth was called the first class and the first entrance.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Our First President

—S.W. Dhabe*

Dr. Rajendra Prasad who was the President of India from 1950 to 1962, was a veteran freedom fighter embodying the best traditions of our culture. He was an erudite scholar and a man of deep learning and high thinking. He was born in Zeradei Village in Bihar State on 3 December 1884, a year before the Indian National Congress was founded. His father, Munshi Mahadeo Sahai was a well known scholar of Persian and Sanskrit languages and was popular in the country side for giving free Ayurvedic and Unani treatment to several patients in that area. His mother was religious-minded lady who brought up Rajen Babu to cherish the best ideals of Indian culture and traditions. She had a great influence in moulding his character. His brother Mahadeo Prasad was in fact his guardian and guide.

Rajendra Prasad has a brilliant career at the University level and always stood first in every examination. He obtained the Bachelor's degree in Arts in 1906, did his M.A. in 1908 and won a number of scholarships. After completing his legal studies he started practising as a lawyer in 1908. His hard work and sound knowledge of law made him a prominent personality of the legal profession. Shri Ashutosh Mukherjee, who was Judge of the Calcutta High Court was so impressed by his masterly presentation of law that as Vice-Chancellor, he offered to Dr. Prasad the post of Professor of Law. Dr. Prasad obtained

* Shri Dhabe is a former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha).

the degree of Master of Law in 1915 in First Division, and after two years, doctorate in Law. After the bifurcation of the High Court of Bihar from Bengal in 1916 Dr. Rajendra Prasad shifted to Patna for practice. He had to give up his lucrative practice in Calcutta which he had established for 15 long years. In Bihar, he ranked among the leading advocates. Being a spiritual personality, he used to spend most of his income for the cause of the people. Gradually, he started taking interest in political activities and was drawn to the Indian National Congress. He joined the Congress in 1911, was elected member of the A.I.C.C. in 1917, and soon ranked among the top leaders of the Indian National Congress.

Champaran

There was a great mass movement in North Bihar because the indigo cultivator landlords were committing atrocities on the poor tenants and unleashing all kinds of miseries on them. Dr. Rajendra Prasad actively participated in this movement which resulted in the passing of Champaran Agrarian Act in 1918 and offered relief of Ryots of Champaran who had for a long period suffered social injustices. As a matter of fact, the fight for social justice led to fostering of a sense of nationalism. Gandhiji wrote that struggle was a proof of the fact that disinterested service of the people in any sphere ultimately helps the country politically. Champaran proved to be a nursery for new nationalism, in view of its emphasis on moral values, non-violence, liberalism, social reforms and eradication of economic abuses. Dr. Rajendra Prasad had a lion's share in the intensification of this movement. In fact it made radical changes in his career and brought him very close to Mahatma Gandhi. After Rajen Babu took over as President of the Indian National Congress many other similar movements were enunciated.

Freedom Struggle

As a true follower of Mahatma Gandhi Dr. Rajendra Prasad took active interest in the freedom struggle. He had the privilege to be the President of the Indian National Congress three times and to guide its deliberations with clarity of vision.

The Non-Cooperation and Swadeshi movements organised by the Congress are too well known. In the Congress session held at Nagpur in December 1920, the details of the Non-Cooperation programme were finalised. In his historic speech on 6 April, 1919 at Patna, on the Maidan by the side of the Ganges, he declared that the Congress stood for Swaraj and nothing short of Swaraj would satisfy them. The movement of Satyagrah was started which was a fight for righteousness. A true Satyagrahi must-not waver, must not be violent and should be prepared to suffer for it. The movement of Non-Cooperation is only an extension of it. What Satyagrahis wanted was the right to govern and manage their own affairs and to make and unmake laws. The history of freedom struggle is well known. As Congress President, Rajen Babu first presided over the Congress at its 40th Session held at Bombay in October, 1934. Thereafter, as Congress President, he travelled throughout the country. After the Lucknow session in 1936 Dr. Rajendra Prasad presided over the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan at Nagpur formed by Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samiti, with him as its President, for the propagation of Hindi language in the non-Hindi knowing areas. This Organisation is doing laudable work even today. In the Tripuri Session held near Jabalpur in 1939, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was elected as President but he resigned due to differences and Dr. Rajendra Prasad was again elected President. He took active part in the Quit India Movement. In the elections to the Central Assembly, the Congress took part and won a majority of seats. The Congress having accepted the long term proposal of the Cabinet mission of convening the Constituent Assembly for framing the Constitution of United and Democratic India, elections to the Constituent Assembly were held in which the Congress members were returned with an overwhelming majority. On 2 September, 1946 interim government was formed with 12 ministers, including Dr. Rajendra Prasad who was made incharge of the portfolio of Agriculture and Food. As a Minister, he took several steps to make the country self sufficient in food, tried to reduce imports and laid greater emphasis on internal procurement.

On 11 December 1946, he was unanimously elected President of the Constituent Assembly in due recognition of his services to the country for so many years. Felicitating him on his election, a number of members, including Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, N.G.S. Iyenger eulogised his contribution to the national life. The tribute paid to him by Shrimati Sarojini Naidu is, however, worth mentioning:

"Sometime I was asked to compose an epic into an epigram about Dr. Rajendra Prasad. I was asked to say a line about Dr. Rajendra Prasad and I said I could do so if I had a pen of Gold dipped in honey because all the words will not suffice to explain his qualities or were adequate to pay tribute to his qualities. I conceive him not as one with flowing sword but as an angel with the lily which wins victories over the words of men, because in him there is essential sweetness, that is part of his strength, essential wisdom that is part of his experience, there is essential clarity of vision, creative imagination and creative faith that brings him very close to the feet of Lord Budha himself. He is a symbol of India's destiny today. He will help us in framing that charter that restores our Mother still in fetters, our rightful place as a torch bearer of liberty, love and peace."

In his inaugural address Dr. Rajendra Prasad stated that the Constituent Assembly, though it had certain limitations was an independent self-governing and self determining body. In its proceedings no outside authority could interfere and its decisions no one from outside could oppose, alter or modify. In his concluding address, he stated:

"You Ladies and Gentlemen, who have come here for framing a Constitution of independent and free India, will be able to get rid of those limitations and place before the world a model of Constitution that will satisfy all our people, all groups, all communities, all religions in habitating this vast land, and which will ensure to everyone, freedom of action, freedom of thought, freedom of belief and freedom

of worship, which will guarantee to everyone opportunities of rising to his highest, which will guarantee to everyone freedom in all respect."

It is well known that the Constituent Assembly did remarkable job and gave to the country a democratic Constitution, which every citizen of India would feel proud of. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was elected on 26 January, 1950 as interim President. In the first Presidential election held in 1952 he was elected President and re-elected in 1957. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, as President of India, visited a number of countries and carried the message of goodwill and world fellowship. He was also a prolific writer whose books "*Satyagraha in Champaran*," "*Mahatma Gandhi and Bihar—some reminiscences*," "*India Divided*," "*Bapu Ke Kadamon mein*" all in Hindi and his autobiography are too well known. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru very aptly summed up the personality of Rajen Babu while unveiling his portrait in the Kerala Assembly Chamber in 1958, when he observed.

"Rajen Babu not only occupies the highest office in our country but is something much more, because he embodies in his life the Indian national movement through which we have passed. Dr. Rajendra Prasad represents the basic Indian values and traditions more specially of rural India, though he is not an ordinary peasant. He is highly intellectual, great educationalist and an able lawyer."

Dr. Rajendra Prasad died in 1963. His life is an example of selfless and dedicated service to the nation which every citizen of this country should try to emulate.

Nagpur Satyagraha

Hailing, as I do, from the city of Nagpur, I feel sentimentally attached to this great man. He was closely associated with this part of the country having visited Nagpur and Wardha quite often. In 1923, there was Zenda Satyagraha in Nagpur in defence of the honour of the Indian National Flag which was led by the well-known freedom fighter, Pandit Sunderlal, then President of Central Provinces Congress Committee. The Satyagraha originated from Jabalpur when the British

Government did not permit the elected body to hoist the National Flag on Municipal building. The movement spread throughout Central Provinces and Berar States and Nagpur. The Government banned, by an order dated 1 May, 1923, all processions with National Flag. In the Satyagraha, Jamnalal Bajaj and Shri Vallabhbai Patel were arrested. There after, it became a national movement aimed at vindicating the honour of the National Flag. Bihar too did not lag behind and hundreds of volunteers under the leadership of Dr. Rajendra Prasad courted arrest. One of the Satyagrahis, Hardev Narayansingh died as a martyr in the Nagpur Central Jail. Flag Day was observed on 18 July throughout India. It was in the Jail at Nagpur that Sardar Patel and Rajen Babu became intimate friends. Rajen Babu in his speech said that the tri-coloured flag was not simply a piece of coloured cloth, but something much more as the idea underlining it was transcendental. Since represented the honour and self-respect of a Nation no self-respecting person could brook the least insult to his National Flag.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was a unique personality who left behind eventful prints on the sands of Indian history. Simple living and high thinking was his motto. He was liked by all because of his simplicity, friendly nature, transparent sincerity, affection for the toiling masses and devotion to Motherland.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: His role as First President of India

*—Professor Balraj Madhok**

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who presided over India's Constituent Assembly and was later elected first President of our Republic, was an embodiment of Hindu ideal of 'simple living and high thinking'. He was a great scholar, an outstanding jurist and an eminent freedom fighter. He left his impact on many fields of our national life. The crowning glory, however, was his role as the President of India in the formative years of our new-born Republic.

Being a great jurist and having been the President of the Constituent Assembly, he had full grasp of the letter and spirit of the Indian Constitution. As the first President of India, it fell upon him to "preserve, protect and defend" the supreme law of the land.

Under the Constitution of India, it is the President who is at the apex of the Indian polity. He is not only the Head of the State but the entire executive power also vests in him. He is also the Supreme Commander of the Defence Forces of the country. Elected by the people of India through their elected representatives in Parliament and the State legislatures, he represents the entire nation and not any party, group or class.

The traditions and precedents that were set by Dr. Rajendra Prasad in regard to the position and role of the President in relation to that of the Prime Minister and his personal equation

* Professor Madhok is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

with the first Prime Minister of free India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, are of great significance for understanding and evaluating the Indian Constitution, in practice. As in the case of the Union and the States, the relations between the President and the Prime Minister during the early years of our republic were guided more by personal rapport the two leaders had as colleagues and co-workers of the Congress party than by strict constitutional requirements. As a matter of fact, this extra-constitutional relationship between the Head of the State and the Head of the Government, stood in the way of the Indian Constitution coming into full play.

Pandit Nehru enjoyed supreme position in the Congress organisation as well as in the government particularly after the death of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in December, 1950. As a dedicated and committed Congressman, Dr. Rajendra Prasad always looked upon Pandit Nehru as his leader. Pandit Nehru too was conscious of his superior position. While he showed due respect and deference to the office of President held by Rajen Babu, he believed, in practice if not in theory, in the supremacy of the Prime Minister. The personal equation between him and Dr. Rajendra Prasad therefore, gave a twist to the relationship between the two top offices of the polity which was not strictly in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Constitution.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad knew fully well that Constitution had conferred on the President a supervisory role also. But he was too gentle and Pandit Nehru was too assertive and tactful to allow a situation to be created which might smack of discord. Pandit Nehru saw to it that the President was kept informed of all the day today developments inside and outside the country and his concurrence was invariably obtained on all important decisions and appointments. Dr. Rajendra Prasad scrutinised all appointments and decisions taken in his name and his opinion obviously used to receive due attention. He was particularly careful with regard to the imposition of President's rule in any State. But towards the close of his second term as President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad had developed a feeling that the office of

the President was being devalued in practice. He, therefore, suggested examination in depth of the position of the President under the Indian Constitution.

So long as Dr. Rajendra Prasad remained President he maintained the independence, dignity and prestige of the high office. As a young member of Lok Sabha, I had the opportunity to meet him and discuss issues of public importance. I was impressed by his dignity, humility and vast knowledge of national affairs and the Constitution. He kept an eye on the performance of members in the Parliament and quite often gave encouragement to promising members.

The political developments after 1967 have somehow created a feeling in some quarters that the Parliamentary system of the British model, in which the Prime Minister is supreme and the Head of the State is merely a figure-head, is not suited to Indian conditions. A change over to Presidential system of the American model has been suggested by a number of people. According to my reading of the Indian Constitution the present system can become more effective if the office of the President is given back the role and position that was visualised for it by the founding fathers of our Constitution.

The character and personality of the person who holds any office has much to do with preservation of the dignity of that office. The office of the President of India has somehow been devalued and it is therefore high time that steps are taken to elect the President on the basis of merit without any partywhip being issued to the members of the electoral college, directing them to vote a particular candidate. The voters must be encouraged to vote according to their conscience for the best man, irrespective of his political or party affiliations. Unlike the Prime Minister who has to be a party man, the President of India should be a man above parties.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was conscious of his national position and felt that he must play a unifying role and work for strengthening the national unity. He, therefore, laid stress in his speeches on the basic factors of national unity. Speaking at

Trivandrum on 7 February, 1956 he called upon the people living near the Kanyakumari to believe that "the areas at the foot of the Himalayas are yours, and permit me, living as I do at the foot of the Himalayas, to treat Kanyakumari as mine. Unless we develop this sense of unity and patriotism and subordinate local, parochial, caste and communal considerations to the consideration of the country at large we might lose the freedom which we have attained and our democracy might be very short-lived".

Dr. Rajendra Prasad considered Sanskrit to be a major factor for Indian unity and advocated giving it due position in our national life. In the course of his Presidential speech at the annual conference of Sanskrit Vishwa Parishad on 11 November, 1955 he observed:

"In hoary past, when in the modern sense of the term there were hardly any means of communications, the whole country had more or less a common education. It was Sanskrit which provided a common medium of expression and literary effort. While regional languages in varying stages of developments were spoken in various regions, Sanskrit truly was the lingua franca. It enjoyed what we might call the status of national language of India for many centuries. Whatever the status that we might agree to give formally to this great language, the fact remains that it provides the common fund from which the growing languages of India derive sustenance."

Besides giving due recognition to Sanskrit, he advocated adoption of Devnagiri as the common script for writing all the Indian languages with a view to promote national unity. Speaking at Andhra Sahitya Academy at Hyderabad on 7 August, 1957, he said:

"Now that we have achieved political freedom it is incumbent upon us to behave and carry on our affairs in such a way that the independence which we have won may last for ever and ever.... I was thinking how we could help this unification still further. I have had some

experience in this which I want to share with you. Many years ago, there used to be published "Devnagar" which was run by a judge of Calcutta High Court named Sharda Charan. 'Devnagar' carried articles in different languages of India but in the Devnagiri script. We found that we could understand a great deal of the other languages through the Devnagiri script. I have ever since felt that it is possible for the provincial languages to be better known and understood if we could render them in one script. Fortunately, alphabets of all Indian languages, except Tamil, are the same. That is the case not only in India but outside India also. For example, Ceylon, Burma and Thailand have the same alphabets as ourselves. The script is different but sounds are the same. We have this advantage. If we could adopt one script, it would be easier for people of one language to understand people speaking other languages. Devnagiri script is being mentioned because Sanskrit is always written in Devnagiri script and it is already known all over the country."

These ideas of Dr. Rajendra Prasad about the unifying role of Sanskrit and adoption of Devnagiri as the common script for all Indian languages have become more relevant now when new dangers to national unity have arisen.

The need of the hour is the restoration of the authority, dignity and prestige of the office of the President of India as visualised by founding fathers of Indian Constitution and proper understanding and propagation of the basic factors of Indian Unity. The nation can remember Dr. Rajendra Prasad best only by imbibing his ideas and ideals because as Plato said "Ideas and ideals rule the world and not the man."

Rajendra Prasad: A Born President

— *Professor P.G. Mavalankar*

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was born, as it were, for the Republic's Presidency. From the humble beginning as the President of the Patna Municipality in his home-State of Bihar, he rose to occupy and adorn the highest office of the President of our 'Sovereign Democratic Republic'. Indeed, 'Destiny' had rightly and deservedly carved out for him this honourable and onerous position of national duty in the formative years of the newly independent, yet ancient and mature, polity. That Dr. Prasad became the first President of free India was perhaps an accident, but soon it turned out to be a welcome and happy occurrence. He was by no means a novice in the art and practice of presiding; he had already been the President of the Constituent Assembly of India, and had performed the challenging task diligently and with dignity, bringing lustre to the job and bearing upon it the stamp of meaningful creativity. Even in the earlier period, during the daring and decisive days of the struggle for the country's freedom, Babu Rajendra Prasadji (as he was affectionately known and endearingly called all over the land) had discharged the delicate and difficult responsibilities of the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress with his quiet confidence and adroit skill. Thus, Rajendra Prasad had easily and amply demonstrated and proved his undoubted abilities and tested talents as a presiding deity. So, when the clarion call was heralded, he was ready and willing to respond. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was unanimously

*Professor Mavalankar is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

chosen as the nation's first President, and the republic's foremost citizen, on the eve of the inauguration of the new republic on 26 January 1950. On that historic day, he took the oath before entering upon his exalted office swearing "in the name of God", that he would "faithfully execute the office of the President of India", and would "to the best of" his "ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and the law" and that he would "devote" himself "to the service and well-being of the people of India", [(Vide Article 60 of the Constitution of India).] Subsequent events and significant developments clearly showed that President Prasad steadfastly fulfilled and honoured his various presidential assignments and commitments in full measure and with competence and courage.

Young Rajendra Prasad hailed from a respectable and cultured family. From his early childhood, he evinced keen interest both in studies and sports. He was easily one of the most brilliant boys, and his sharp intellect and proven talents quickly opened up the academic floodgates of the famous University of Calcutta, helping him widen his horizon and broaden his outlook, while still in the prime of his youth. For once, a Bihari boy had blossomed in the Bengali climate. First as a student, then as a lecturer, and later as a lawyer, Rajendra Prasad excelled in his pursuits, and acquitted himself creditably. He soon set up his legal practice at the Patna High Court. Back in his home-State, and well-versed in the profession though, Rajendra Prasad was not quite at home in what he was doing. In his lengthy and fascinating 'autobiography' written by him originally in Hindi (and translated into several languages), he has narrated a number of small and big happenings which moulded his character in no unmistakable terms and charted the course of his active and hectic life in no less a magical, and even mysterious, manner. The near thousand pages of this scintillating and reminiscent story unfolds before our eyes and enchanting picture of the national scene in the first half of the twentieth century, as it also presents a vivid portrait of the

'hero', namely the serene and civilised 'gentleman' that Babu Rajendra Prasad has been in the public and political life of 'Bharat' that is India.

Sensitive by instinct and sentimental by temper, Rajendra Prasad was so very keen to serve the Motherland by joining, as an active and full-time member, the Servants of India Society, founded by the great and gentle Gopal Krishna Gokhale at Pune, in Maharashtra on 12 June, 1905. The ideal, aim and object of the 'Society' was to train and throw up in the selfless service of the soil the "national missionaries" and "to promote, by constitutional means, the true interests of the Indian people". The motto and the programme of the servants of Indian Society had captivated the mind and imagination of the youthful Rajendra Prasad. While Gokhale was visiting Calcutta, Rajendra, and his friend and co-student in law, Srikrishna Prasad had the privilege of having a personal meeting with the Right Honourable Leader and Parliamentarian Gopal Krishna Gokhale in that metropolitan city. Rajendra Prasad was all set for a formal entry into the 'Society'. He had, perhaps even before meeting Gokhale, a secret yearning for public service. To serve the poor and the down-trodden was Rajendra's passion and dream already. And yet, his elder brother Mahendra Prasad, to whom the younger brother was devotedly attached and was no less indebted on more than one score, dissuaded him from being inducted into the fold of Gokhale's 'Society'. Rajendra Prasad was undoubtedly disappointed and dejected, but he silently reconciled to the situation and resigned to his fate.

Good luck, and Godspeed, were in store, however, for Rajendra Prasad. If he could not sit at the feet of Gokhale, it was so because, he was destined to come under the spell of Gokhale's disciple, Mohandas Karmchand Gandhi. Gandhiji had returned home from South Africa for good, and had settled down in Ahmedabad, in his home State of Gujarat in 1915.

After planting his foot firmly in the 'ashram' on the banks of the river Sabarmati, the 'Mahatma' started, rather re-started, his campaign for civil disobedience; and prior to the 'Kheda Satyagraha' in 1917-1918, Gandhiji had gone to Bihar, for launching yet another movement of the peasants and the people against the oppressive alien regime, in the district of Champaran, in 1917. The 'movement of truth' arrived for the public-spirited pleader of Patna, for Rajendra Prasad almost intuitively and promptly joined the batch of the Bihar lawyers who had actively associated with, nay actually assisted, Gandhiji in his novel struggle for awakening the masses and uplifting them from a life of centuries of degradation and depravation. The Champaran Experiment was, verily the first example of a mass movement in India. The entire nation was electrified and energised; Gandhiji gave further and fresh dimensions to his method of 'Satyagraha' by what he did and achieved in Champaran. It brought, in Gandhiji's camp many a man of the intellectual eminence of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The 'Mahatma' had lent a spiritual momentum to the popular struggle, and it was no wonder that men like Rajendra Prasad were willingly and convincingly drawn towards Gandhiji so as to remain in his camp permanently and purposefully. The full story of the 'Satyagraha in Champaran' is ably and aptly written and documented by Babu Rajendra Prasad himself in his 225-page book bearing the same title. It was written in Hindi in 1919 and published for the first time in 1922. Its English version was published in March, 1928. Rajendra Prasad dedicated this book "to Oppressed Humanity". The direct and live contact with Gandhiji brought Rajendra Prasad in the vanguard of the national movement. He became a leading Congressman. The spiritual sustenance provided by Gandhiji remained in good stead in everything that Rajendra Prasad did for the country. Rajen Babu had never relegated the rural India to a secondary status or place. Indeed, he kept the countryside and its teeming millions constantly in front of him. After all, India lived, and lives, in her countless villages and Rajendra Prasad always gave a high priority to the simple folks and their lives and problems. He was deeply impressed by Gandhiji's 14-point

'Constructive Programme', and issued a 48-page brochure outlining "some suggestions". It was a long and eventful journey for Rajendra Prasad — from being a pleader in a Patna Court to a champion for the causes of the depressed and suppressed people all over the sub-continent. It was also an arduous, unexpectedly exciting as well as an agreeable and soul-satisfying voyage. Service to, and of, the people was both a mission and a joy. Rajen Babu's belief in the Gandhian Constructive Programme was not only an 'article of faith' to him but also a living and real language and ideology for dynamic and daily action. He experienced this, thanks to a happy accident of history, when he suddenly came under Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual spell and shelter, and remained so throughout his life.

Dr. Prasad's contribution as President of the Indian National Congress was important and enormous. He earned thereby the affection and esteem of his innumerable countrymen. They held him in high respect, and wherever he went, he received great attention and admiration. He became the nation's living symbol of integrity and culture. This genuine popularity enabled him all the more to carry out his pivotal work at and from, Rashtrapati Bhavan with independence and impartiality, with dignity and decorum. Dr. Rajendra Prasad also served as the Minister for Food and Agriculture in the Interim Government formed on 2 September, 1948. It was a vital assignment at a difficult time. But he steered through with a good deal of success and with no less satisfaction to himself. Left to himself, he would have continued in the Union Cabinet when Independence dawned on 15 August 1947. But he had, in the meantime, been elected to be the presiding deity of the Constituent Assembly of India, and it was too crucial and creative a task to be combined with a cabinet post. The loss, if any, to the Union Ministry was more than a gain to the Constituent Assembly.

The Constituent Assembly met in New Delhi for the first time on 9 December, 1946. Two days later, on 11 December, Dr. Rajendra Prasad was elected its President. This was the nation's confidence in, and recognition of, Dr. Prasad's outstanding qualities of head and heart. Dr. Sarvapalli

Radhakrishnan echoed the sentiments of all Constitution-makers, who had gathered in the House, when felicitating the unanimously elected President, the philosopher—stateman said:

“A Constitution is the fundamental law of the nation.... It is not an accident that our Chairman comes from Bihar. He is impregnated with the spirit of ‘Vihara’, the invincibility of gentleness—the gospel of India. According to the ‘Mahabarata’, gentleness can overcome the hardest things; it can overcome the softest things. There is nothing impossible to be overcome by gentleness and, therefore, the sharpest weapon we have is gentleness. In Dr. Rajendra Prasad we have one who embodies this spirit of gentleness. He is the son of goodness, he has great patience and courage, he has suffered.”

Constituent Assembly President Dr. Prasad, while responding, in all humility and with gratitude, to the many words of praise showered on him from all sides of the House observed: “this Assembly is a self-governing and self-determining, independent body in whose proceedings no outside authority can interfere and whose decisions no one from outside can upset, alter or modify.” The Constituent Assembly was indeed, the Supreme Chamber whose task was to draft swifty and suitably, but not hurriedly and haphazardly, a democratic Constitution for the vast and varied, ancient and modern, land that Mother India is. This seemingly near-impossible, mission was accomplished, thanks mainly to its visionary leaders and dedicated members, in a comparatively short span of three years.

As Granville Austin neatly put it: “These tasks the members approached with remarkable idealism and a strength of purpose born at the struggle for independence. A Constitution, members realised, could not by itself make a new India but they intended in to light the way.” Sir B.N. Rau, the specially appointed Constitutional Advisor of India, alongwith a galaxy of distinguished and experienced constitutional Pundits such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar and N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, V.T. Krishnamachari, K.M. Munshi, K.

Santhanam, K.T. Shah— to name only a few joined by the several seasoned statesmen and stalwarts of the freedom movement did undoubtedly illumine the path for the present generation and the posterity. Granville Austin succinctly fixed the focus on the four national guiding stars—Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. In the words of the celebrated American author and historian: “Nehru, Patel, Prasad, and Azad, in fact, constituted an oligarchy within the Assembly”.*

The 3-year long serious and sustained labours of the Constituent Assembly Members fruited when at last the Motion “That the Constitution as settled by the Assembly be passed” was adopted without any dissent and with prolonged cheers on 26 November, 1949. Before formally putting the Motion which was moved earlier by Dr. Ambedkar, who delivered a brilliant and thought-provoking speech while moving the Motion on 25 November 1949, President Prasad desired to say a few words. He spoke in Hindi. While congratulating the Assembly on accomplishing a task of such tremendous magnitude, he dwelt at some length on the history and logistics of the great exercise of Constitution-making gone into vigorously by the Members. As regards the position of the President, he said:

“We have had to reconcile the position of an elected President with an elected Legislature and, in doing so, we have adopted more or less the position of the British monarch for the President. This may or may not be satisfactory. Some people think too much power has been given to the President, others think that the President, being an elected President, should have even more powers than are given to him”.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad then spoke about the modality of election of the President, and he finally conceded that “it is as well that his position is that of a constitutional President”. Dr.

*Austin, Granville: *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford London 1966

Prasad, perhaps significantly left the matter at rest there, his unintentional silence on the overall efficacy of the office of the President of India did later prove somewhat eloquent and meaningful, during the years of his presidency from 26 January 1950 to 12 May 1962. Happily, he also opined on the provision for adult suffrage in our Constitution a bravely and wisely written 'article of faith', then he observed:

"Some people have doubted the wisdom of adult franchise. Personally, although I took upon it as an experiment the result of which no one will be able to forecast today, I am not dismayed by it. I am a man of the village, ...my roots are still there. I, therefore, know the village people who will constitute the bulk of this vast electorate. In my opinion, our people possess intelligence and common sense. They also have a culture which the sophisticated people of today may not appreciate but which is solid.... I have, therefore, no misgivings about the future, on their account."

Towards the end of this candid and carefully-worded concluding speech, President Prasad mentioned "only two regrets which I must share with the honourable Members. I would have liked to have some qualifications laid down for members of the Legislatures. It is anomalous that we should insist upon high qualifications for those who administer or help in administering the law but none for those who make it except that they are elected. A law-giver requires intellectual equipment. but even more than that, capacity to take a balanced view of things, to act independently and above all to be true to those fundamental things of life—in one word, to have character". Members from all sides instantly agreed by warmly saying: "Hear, Hear" The President continued: "It is not possible to devise any yardstick for measuring the moral qualities of a man and so long as that it is not possible, our Constitution will remain defective". Dr. Prasad's "other regret" was "that we have not been able to draw up our first Constitution of a free Bharat in an Indian Language." But the President admitted: "The difficulties in both cases were

practical and proved insurmountable". But, he lamented, "that does not make the regret any the less poignant." He stressed, in conclusion, on the supporting need for strong conventions to make a democratic Constitution workable and worthwhile. He advised those who have to work democratic institutions successfully to cultivate the "willingness to respect the viewpoint of others, capacity for compromise and accommodation." After over four decades of our democratic survival, with the fabric and framework of parliamentary institutions still fortunately intact, we need to ponder over, and purposefully implement these wise words of caution and call all the more sincerely and honestly.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was a learned pleader, a lovable comrade, a passionate crusader, an able administrator, an astute parliamentarian and above all, a civilized and cultured soul. He was a trusted national leader, respected for his simplicity and nobility. He gave glory to the Presidency of our Republic and worked ceaselessly for the unity of India. He remained loyal to the great heritage of India. He learnt his lessons in public service at the feet of Mahatma Gandhi and did his utmost to imbibe in his sayings and doings the spirit of the 'Father of the Nation'. Sarojini Naidu, "India's Nightingale" and one of the dear colleagues of Rajendra Prasad, had, on the occasion of Dr. Prasads, election as President of the Constituent Assembly, poetically observed:

"I conceive him not as one with the flowing sword but as an angel with the lily which wins victories over the hearts of men, because in him there is essential sweetness, that is part of his strength, there is essential wisdom that is part of his experience, there is essential clarity of vision, creative, imagination and creative faith that brings him very near the feet of Lord Buddha himself. He is the symbol of India's destiny today. He will help us in framing that character that restores to our Mother—our Mother still in fetters—her rightful place as torch-bearer of liberty, love and peace."

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: A Great life Greatly lived

—*Dr. Sushila Nayar**

Dr. Rajendra Prasad stands out as one of the most luminous stars in the galaxy of national leaders who led India to freedom along the path charted by Mahatma Gandhi. He is also among the very few who remained steadfast till to the end to the ideals and values enunciated by the Father of the Nation. Whenever there was confusion in the ranks or the leadership of the Congress and the dominant sections found it easier to stray from the narrow path of non-violence, which was the case on a number of occasions much to the distress of Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad remained unshaken in his conviction that Gandhiji's path was the only way and continued to work for the cause.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was born on 3 December 1884 at Zeradei in Saran district of North Bihar. He came from a prosperous Kayastha family that held considerable landed property. In 1896 when he was barely twelve, he was married to Rajbansidevi. He had his university education in Calcutta, from where he passed his M.A. in 1907. Later he did B.L. in 1910 and M.L. in 1915, for he wanted to make of himself a successful lawyer. However he practised law only by fits and starts from 1911 to 1920, first at the Calcutta High Court and

*Dr. Sushila Nayar is a former Union Minister, an eminent Gandhian, freedom fighter and social worker.

then at the Patna High Court. In between he also taught for two years at a college in Calcutta.

As a student, Rajendra Prasad had a brilliant academic record throughout and as a lawyer he had made a name for himself in a very short time.

But even while he was struggling to establish his legal practice, Rajendra Prasad was reaching out into areas of public work. In 1912, he served as secretary of the reception committee at the session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. In 1913 he presided over the Bihar Students' Conference held at Monghyr.

Rajendra Prasad came to know Gandhiji in 1917 during the Champaran Satyagraha. The poor villagers of Champaran were being exploited by the Indigo Planters. The exploitation had been going on for many years and in spite of all efforts by the Champaran cultivators, including resort to law courts, relief eluded them. The foreign government was with the exploiters. Even the law courts failed to give justice to the poor ryots who were forced to grow indigo on 3 out of 20 parts of their best land and were paid very poorly. There were many other illegal exactions by the Indigo planters and their officials.

There had been revolts and many cultivators had gone to jail and suffered in various other ways at the hands of the planters and their assistants. But the exploitation went on. The cultivators were very poor, most of them being on the verge of starvation. There were no educational or health facilities for them or their women and children. They had to work and live under inhuman and most humiliating conditions.

Rajkumar Shukla, one of the victims of Indigo planters, succeeded in making Gandhiji interested in their problem at the Lucknow Congress in 1916 and brought him to Bihar to see things for himself early in 1917. He took him to Rajendra Prasad's house at Patna. The owner was not in town and the servants, thinking them to be poor clients of their master, put them in an out-house. They did not even allow them the use of the lavatory and bathroom. Gandhiji contacted Muzharul Haq, a

leading lawyer and Congress leader of Patna, whom he had known in England. The latter took him to his own house and the same night Gandhiji left for Champaran along with Rajkumar Shukla. At Muzzaffarpur, he was received by Acharya Kripalani who was a Professor in one of the local colleges. Rajendra Prasad was greatly embarrassed when he learnt how Gandhiji was treated at his house at Patna. He soon joined Gandhiji in Champaran as one of his disciples.

Gandhiji, having decided to make an enquiry into the complaints of Indigo cultivators, began taking statements from all the victims. Before starting his enquiry, he met the district authorities as well as the officers of the Planters Association. They tried to obstruct him. An extermment order was passed on him by the District Magistrate which he disobeyed. Rajendra Prasad and other lawyers were greatly impressed. They decided to continue the enquiry if he was sent to jail and follow him to jail, if necessary. It delighted Gandhiji and he said that success would then be theirs for sure. The extermment order was withdrawn in the end and the enquiry was allowed to continue.

Gandhiji needed interpreters, workers with legal knowledge and scribes to record the statements of the peasantry. A number of public-spirited lawyers volunteered—foremost among them being Gorakh Prasad, Brij Kishore Prasad, Rajendra Prasad, Ramnavami Prasad and Dharnidhar Prasad. Beginning from 17 April 1917 they set themselves to recording statements of peasants, first in Motihari and then in Bettiah, working from early morning till late in the evening and had, in a matter of just three weeks, collected no less than 4,000 statements, on the basis of which Gandhiji could send a report to the authorities, which resulted in the setting up a government enquiry with Gandhiji as a member to represent the Indigo cultivators. The report of this committee was for putting an end to the centuries' old exploitation of the Champaran Indigo's cultivators. Writing about Rajendra Prasad and Brijkishore Prasad in his autobiography, Gandhiji

says they were a matchless pair, who devotion made it impossible for him to take a single step without their help.

Rajendra Prasad's family was of orthodox Hindus. He could take food cooked only by a Brahmin or a man of his own caste. He was not used to doing any work with his own hands. Almost all the lawyers who had come to help Gandhiji were in the same boat and had brought their servants. But under Gandhiji's discipline, they learnt to do their own work and do without the help of servants. Rajendra Prasad and others would draw water from the well for their bath and wash their clothes. They learnt to clean their rooms and wash their eating utensils after meals and they took turns to clean the cooking utensils. They learnt to eat together and became one family irrespective of their caste. These were revolutionary changes in Bihar in those days.

Rajen Babu and other lawyers sat on the floor with small desks in front of them from sunrise to sunset recording statements, with a brief lunch break and a short rest. In the evening, they went for a walk with Gandhiji and had talks with him which served as their general education class.

Gandhiji was not satisfied with working merely for the end of the exploitation of the villagers by the indigo planters, in which he was successful. He wanted to improve the living condition of the villagers of Champaran. He made Kasturba and other Ashram women distribute simple medicines and run schools, while the enquiry was going on. The women looked after the sick and taught the children and adults in the villages the three R's besides giving them health education and telling them about sanitation and other rules of healthy living. Many workers joined Gandhiji in this work from all over India and Rajendra Prasad and his colleagues had their initiation into constructive work.

Rajendra Prasad never looked back. From then on, he was always at the vanguard of all activities undertaken by Gandhiji. In 1918, he founded the Patna English daily *Searchlight* and in 1920 *Desh*, a Hindi weekly.

When Gandhiji started the non-cooperation movement in 1920, Rajendra Prasad was in it from the very inception. At

Patna he set up, along with Mazharul Haq, a Swaraj Sabha to carry the movement forward. He also set up a National College and served as its Principal. Under his active guidance, non-cooperation movement made rapid progress in Bihar, with the message of swaraj, khaddar and prohibition being carried to the farthest villages of the province. Rajendra Prasad in his book *At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi* says that he visited almost every sub-division in the whole province.

When Gandhiji called off the contemplated Civil Disobedience movement following the Chauri Chaura violence in February 1922, he drew a lot of criticism from large sections of Congressmen and many gave expression to their resentment at the meeting of the All India Congress Committee that was held in Delhi towards the end of the month. Rajendra Prasad was one of the few who found themselves in entire agreement with the course adopted by Gandhiji.

When later in March, Gandhiji was arrested and tried, Rajendra Prasad was present in the court, and when the judge pronounced the sentence of six years' imprisonment on Gandhiji, Rajendra Prasad could not contain his emotion and burst into tears.

In Gandhiji's absence, the Congress split in two—prochangers', who wanted to enter legislatures, and 'nochangers' who wanted to stick to non-cooperation and boycott of law courts, government schools, colleges, legislatures, etc. The 'prochangers' were led by stalwarts like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Vithalbhai Patel, Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Ali brothers. The 'nochangers' included lesser known young congressmen like Rajendra Prasad, C. Rajagopalchari, Vallabhbhai Patel and others. But they proved more than a match for the stalwarts.

At the Gaya Congress held in December 1922, Rajendra Prasad was the Secretary of the Reception Committee and as such, bore the brunt of all the preparations for the Congress. The main problem faced by the Committee was the paucity of funds. Rajendra Prasad, with his indefatigable energy set out

on the task of collection of funds and in a very few days, succeeded in collecting several thousands of rupees. He gave credit for this success to the lesson learnt from Gandhiji. Impressed by his example, other Bihar leaders also joined the collection drive and there was enough money available.

At the Gaya Congress session, C.R. Das, who had been elected President at Ahmedabad Congress, but was then in jail and could not preside, was installed as such. He favoured Council-entry. Rajendra Prasad was among the majority, which stuck to the boycott of the Councils. The 'no-changers' carried the day.

Rajendra Prasad was elected Secretary of the All India Congress Committee at this session, and in that capacity, toured a number of provinces in the company of Rajaji, another prominent and uncompromising 'no-changer'. Through the ensuing years, Rajendra Prasad carried on sustained work for the furtherance of Khadi and national education.

Gandhiji, on his release in 1924 on health grounds, decided to hand over the political work of the Congress to 'pro-changers' and devote himself to constructive work. He set up organisation like the All India Spinners' Association, the All India Village Industries Association, Hindustani Talimi Sangh and Harijan Sevak Sangh to carry on constructive work. Rajendra Prasad was at the forefront in every one of *these activities*. His time was so thoroughly taken up with *these tasks* that he ceased even to take any interest in the controversy relating to Council-entry. From 1923 to 1927, he devoted all his time to these activities, except for presiding over sessions of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1926 and 1927.

During the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, Rajendra Prasad was constantly on the move, guiding batches of satyagrahis going out to make salt. He inspected salt manufacture and auctioned salt at public meetings. There were assaults by the police on crowd of satyagrahis and arrests on a large scale. But there never was any instance of violent behaviour

on the part of the satyagrahis. Rajendra Prasad himself received lathi blows from the police.

In the early stages of the movement, the authorities shrank from laying hands on Rajendra Prasad for fear of the disturbances that might follow. Eventually however, he was taken into custody on 6 July 1930 and sentenced to a term of six months' imprisonment. He spent the time in the Hazaribagh Jail where he was transferred from Chhapra.

On 15 January 1934 a devastating earthquake struck North Bihar. It was of such intensity that tremors were felt from Lahore to Shillong and as far south as Bombay and Bezwada (Vijayawada). The disaster took a toll of 25,000 lives. The loss of property was incalculable. The entire city areas were razed to the ground. Roads and bridges were destroyed. Though the calamity took in its sweep an area of about 30,000 square miles, the most affected places were Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Champaran, Purnea and Bhagalpur.

Rajendra Prasad was in jail when the calamity came. But he was released soon after and though not in good health, immediately, took charge of the relief work and organised it in a systematic manner. The response from all over India was quick and generous. No less than seventy-four relief organisations contributed their mite to serve the injured and the homeless. But the main brunt of the work was borne by the Bihar Central Relief Committee, of which Dr. Rajendra Prasad was President and the saving spirit. Rajendra Prasad prevailed upon Gandhiji, who was then touring the South in the Harijan cause, to visit stricken Bihar and Gandhiji did tour Bihar in the company with Rajendra Babu from 12 March to 9 April. He also persuaded Gandhiji to let him have the service of J.C. Kumarappa to organise the account-keeping and get the accounts audited. This was done. Some people later tried to do mud-slinging on Rajendra Prasad regarding the use of large sums collected by the Relief Committee. Rajen Babu had two volumes of audited accounts ready, which silenced the critics.

Following the Congress session of 1938, held under the

Presidentship of Subhas Bose, the organization was caught up in a crisis in consequence of the impatience shown by Subhas Bose on the question of launching a mass civil disobedience movement and the unwillingness of the Working Committee to go along with their President. The differences were so wide that there did not appear to be any possibility of the President and his Working Committee pulling on together and Gandhiji therefore asked Subhas Bose to accept the resignation of the members of the Working Committee and choose his own Working Committee or to resign. When Bose resigned on 29 April 1939 Rajendra Prasad was elected President to steer the Congress through the troubled times. Rajendra Babu discharged his duties as President with great efficiency and single-minded devotion.

When the war broke out, the Congress was under the necessity to redefine its position with regard to its creed of non-violence, for it had to decide what attitude it would adopt towards the War. The dominant section of the Working Committee was of the view that if the British agreed to concede the demand for a National Government, the Congress should support the war. But Gandhiji pointed out that supporting the war would imply supporting violence and participating in it. This, he said, he could not be a party to. Rajendra Prasad was fully in accord with Gandhiji, so much so that he tendered his resignation from the Working Committee. The only other member to do so was Khan Abul Gaffar Khān, another devoted follower of Gandhiji and a staunch adherent of non-violence. Rajendra Babu was persuaded to withdraw his resignation, because it was pointed out that there was no immediate prospect of the Congress going out to assist the British in the War till they had accepted the demand for a National Government. Gaffar Khan, however, did not relent.

The British did not respond to the offer of the Congress to help the war effort if India was given self-government and in consequence the Congress unitedly lauded the individual civil disobedience movement under the guidance of Gandhiji. Rajendra Prasad, not being too well, did not offer satyagraha.

An ailing man courting arrest, Gandhiji said, would mean placing on the Government the responsibility of providing medical treatment for him, or they would be forced to abstain from arresting him. Neither course would be proper.

As the war progressed, with the relentless advance of the Japanese towards the shores of India and with the countries to the south-east of India already under their heels, the question of the defence of India became paramount. Gandhiji was convinced that any defence to be undertaken could only be non-violent. The All-India Congress Committee met at Allahabad in April 1942 to consider the situation. Gandhiji did not attend but sent a draft resolution. This resolution was opposed by Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajagopalchari, Sarojini Naidu, Maulana Azad and others. Rajendra Prasad then came out with another draft which he thought might be found more acceptable. Then, on second thoughts, he withdrew it, not knowing how Gandhiji would take it. Gandhiji's resolution was of course drastically amended by the Working Committee, but Gandhiji said he could carry on with it. At this meeting of the A.I.C.C., Rajendra Babu made a singular contribution.

Later, following the A.I.C.C. meeting at Bombay and the passing of the Quit India Resolution, Government struck at the Congress. Rajendra Babu was in Patna. He had not gone to Bombay as he was not well. He was taken into custody on 9 August. He was at that time a very ill man. His health had shattered in jails and in constant touring of the rural areas. He suffered from Asthma and also amoebic colitis. The dry climate of Wardha suited him and he came there often to meet Gandhiji and to recuperate his health; when he could.

The Quit India movement elicited the most enthusiastic response in Bihar, though to the distress of Rajendra Babu the response was not wholly non-violent. Railway tracks were damaged, telephone and telegraph wires were cut, and many police stations occupied by the people. For a very long time, railway traffic remained disrupted. In some places, Rajendra Babu reports, the writ of the Government had ceased to run for weeks. The leaders were all in jail and the people thought that

so long as there was no loss of life, their activities would be considered non-violent, in which, Gandhiji later explained, they had been wrong.

Rajendra Prasad was released from jail on 15 June 1945 along with the other members of the Congress Working Committee and participated on behalf of the Congress in the Simla Conference convened by the Viceroy from 25 June to 14 July, 1945.

When the first National Government — an Interim one — came to be formed under Jawaharlal Nehru on 2 September, 1946, Dr. Rajendra Prasad joined the Government as Minister for Food and Agriculture. Soon he was called to a higher office—when on 11 December 1946 he took over as President of the Constituent Assembly. His handling of the deliberations of that august body drew wide acclaim. His tenure of this office lasted three years till 1949. On 17 November 1947 he had to take over as President of the Congress as well when Acharya Kripalani relinquished that office.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was not only the first President of Free India, but also the longest serving President. He was elected to the office first on 26 January 1950. He served as Interim President till 13 May 1952, when he was formally elected as President after the first general elections in India and again after the general elections in 1957, to serve till 12 May, 1962. A large number of people wanted him to seek office again. But he had no desire to continue. Also his health had considerably deteriorated. He retired and went to Patna, where he stayed at Sadaquat Ashram. His long tenure as President of India was a period when India was highly respected and appreciated all over the World. He lent to the office of the President great dignity and distinction.

Rajendra Prasad was a scholar of note and many Universities honoured themselves by honouring him with various doctorate degrees. He was awarded D. Lit. by Patna

University, LL.D. by Sagar University, Mysore University and Osmania University and Vidya Vachaspati by the Banaras University.

Rajendra Babu's most abiding qualities of character were his humility, his spirit of self-effacement and sacrifice, and his total dedication to the cause of the country. He was a deeply religious man. Gandhiji's word to him was law and to Gandhiji's ideals he clung all his life. My brother Pyarelalji and I often had the honour of joining him in his evening prayers along with his family members in the Mogul Gardens, and join him at meals in their private dining room afterwards. It was a joy to see him play with his grandchildren and see his solicitude towards the smallest man in his service.

At Patna, Rajendra Prasad continued to take interest in Gandhian work and thoughts and met many visiting scholars and dignitaries. He was especially interested in antinuclear campaign.

He passed away in 1963 and was cremated on the Banks of the Ganga in the orthodox Hindu manner. With Rajen Babu's passing away, closed, perhaps, the most glorious chapter of India's Freedom struggle and the golden dawn of our independence years.

Bharat Ratna: Dr. Rajendra Prasad

—*Ramlal Rahi**

Though I did not have the privilege to meet in person the first President of India, Bharat Ratna, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, our head bows in reverence when we come to know by elderly people about him, his way of life and the path shown by him.

During the period of struggle for independence, on one hand people, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi were ready to lay down their lives for the cause of the nation while on the other, Gandhiji groomed many leaders of his stature in different parts of the country. One of such leaders from Bihar was Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was often referred to as 'Gandhi of Eastern India'. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was steeped in Indian culture and was devoted to the welfare of the entire humanity. Under his leadership, the people of Eastern India, including Bihar were inspired to participate actively in the freedom struggle.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was one of the eminent leaders of our freedom movement. This was evident from the fact that no decision in respect of our national movement was taken even by Bapuji and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru unless it was approved by Rajen Babu. Bapuji once said— "Rajendra Babu's affection for me has made me so dependent on him that I cannot move, even a single step forward without him."

* Shri Rahi is a Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was born on 3 December, 1884 in a Kayastha family in village Zeradei of District Saran of Bihar State. His father died when he was still a child, but the love and affection he received from the elder brother of his father, never made him feel the loss of his father.

Rajen Babu was endowed with outstanding ability and intellect. He was married at an early age of twelve years because of their traditional customs.

He passed his B.A.(Hons.) in three subjects—English, History and Economics. Thereafter, he passed M.A. from Calcutta University. After qualifying in the B.L. and M.L. examinations, he devoted himself to preparing for D.L. He started his practice in 1916 as a lawyer in the High Court of Bihar when it was first set up there and won laurels in this profession.

Besides education, Rajen Babu was drawn towards social service as well as politics and was associated with many social institutions and student organisations. Rajen Babu was a thorough gentleman and a polite person. Under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, he participated in the country's freedom movement very actively. He held several responsible posts at national level and provided efficient and effective leadership to the people in the freedom movement. In 1920, in the Nagpur Session of Congress he gave final shape to the action plan of Gandhiji's Non-Cooperation Movement.

The action plan *inter alia* included: returning the titles conferred by Government; boycotting the Councils and the Courts; quitting Government jobs; setting up of autonomous Panchayats; adopting indigenous cloth (*i.e. Khadi*) in place of foreign cloth and to shun the use of English language. He also set up a Hindu-Muslim solidarity organisation, one of the most important tasks at that time. It is worth mentioning that he refused to participate in the welcome extended to the British

Crown Prince on his arrival in India. This culminated in clashes in Bombay in which 50-60 persons were killed and hundreds injured. This step of Rajen Babu further strengthened his leadership.

He was so amiable and considerate that he was adored by persons belonging to all the communities. He established himself as a leader of national level because of his contribution to a number of social, religious, economic and political developments which occurred at that time. People used to call him the "Gandhi" of Bihar. In 1918 he started publication of an English daily, *Search Light* and a Hindi weekly *Desh* from Bihar to decry the atrocities that were being perpetrated on people. He established Bihar Vidyapeeth. He was appointed Chairman of the Reception Committee for the All India Congress Session held at Gaya.

Rajen Babu was known for his love for Hindi. He was, therefore, requested to preside over the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan held in 1942 at Kakinada. He also presided over the Sahitya Sammelans held at Darbhanga and Kangri. He wanted Hindi to be adopted as the official as well as the national language of India. As the President of the Constituent Assembly also, he laid emphasis on this proposition. According to him, all Indian languages have a rich heritage. But, Hindi is the language which is spoken by most of the people in India and as such it deserves the status of a National language.

As the freedom struggle gained momentum, Dr. Rajendra Prasad became more popular. He was an upright and righteous person. He had no allurements for office or material gains. Since he had undergone the rigours of the freedom struggle and slavery, he emerged as a stronger and upright person.

On 2 September 1946 an interim Government was formed in India comprising 12 Ministers. Rajen Babu was given the portfolio of Food and Agriculture. At that time, because of Second World War the country was facing a crisis on the food front, but Rajen Babu successfully managed to circumvent that crisis.

On 15 August 1947, the country attained independence. Now there was a search for a suitable person who could be entrusted with the responsibility of being the first citizen of Sovereign Democratic Republic of India. The name of the eminent personality selected for the office of the President was Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Apropos the decision of the Constituent Assembly, he held the office of the President of the Constituent Assembly for two years and thereafter became the first duly elected President of India in 1952 and adorned this office for 12 consecutive years. Dr. Sarvpalli Radhakrishnan had also said about him that he embodied in him the qualities of Janak, Buddha and Gandhi. The people of India honoured him in a befitting manner at the Ramliila Ground, New Delhi before he relinquished the office of the President. Speaking on this occasion, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, "This period of 12 years will be known as Dr. Rajendra Prasad period". From the same dias Dr. Rajendra Prasad said with folded hands and with all humility: "If I have committed any mistakes, I beseech forgiveness from God and you" It was his good nature and simplicity which made him an extraordinary person. He was a true symbol of Indian culture. His farewell ceremony was a historic event.

After being the President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan conferred the honour of '*Bharat Ratna*' on the first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad at an impressive ceremony organised in the Parliament House. On 13 May 1962, Dr. Rajendra Prasad left Delhi for his native place. He then spent his last few days at Sadaquat Ashram in Patna. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said of him "his personality has left an indelible imprint on the masses". This proved to be gospel because he had endeared himself to the people of the country to an extent that he has become unforgettable.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: A Symbol of Our Culture

*Chaudhari Ranbir Singh**

India has been fortunate in having as its first President, Babu Rajendra Prasad, a man who was downright peasant in his garments but represented all that is best in our culture. A stalwart of our freedom struggle and one of the most trusted followers of Mahatma Gandhi, he was born in a remote village of Bihar in 1884—a year before the establishment of the Indian National Congress—the organisation he subsequently headed, not once but thrice. Though hailing from an interior village which lacked even the basic facility of a primary school, he rose to become the President of the Constituent Assembly and later the Head of State of the largest democracy for two terms—not by mere luck but by virtue of his brilliance, devotion, sacrifice and hard work.

Rajen Babu was a very popular name in the freedom movement and being a freedom fighter myself, I had, before knowing him, heard of him and of the immense love and trust that Gandhiji had for him. I came into personal contact with him and had the opportunity of his noble company only in the Constituent Assembly. When it came to electing its President who would preside over and conduct its deliberations leading to the birth of a Constitution, the choice obviously fell on Rajen Babu. He carried out this responsibility with great tact, dexterity,

*Chaudhari Ranbir Singh is a Member of the Constituent Assembly and a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

sagacity and wisdom and to the satisfaction of each and every member of the House.

Though Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had the highest regard for Rajen Babu who was a top-ranking Congressman, he somehow did not favour his name when it came to electing a provisional President of the country. In our meetings of the Congress party, Panditji often used to impress upon us that C. Rajagopalachari and not Rajen Babu, would be the better choice for the highest office. He would back up his argument by saying that after all it was he who, as head of the Government, was required to deal with the President. Professor N.G. Ranga, who hailed from the same State from which C. Rajagopalachari came, was a staunch supporter of Rajen Babu as against C. Rajagopalachari. In one of our party meetings, I remember, Prof. Ranga had said that the choice of C. Rajagopalachari as provisional President was not acceptable to the party because C. Rajagopalachari, as Governor-General, represented the British Crown. Lending support to Rajen Babu he said: "When the Members of the Constituent Assembly were treated as *ex officio* Members of Parliament, I fail to understand why the President of the Constituent Assembly should not be recognised as the Provisional President?"

I had also once mentioned in the Constituent Assembly that since an overwhelming majority in the Congress Party was of the view that Rajen Babu should be our President, he (Rajen Babu) should not decline the offer.

There was atleast one thing which I and Rajen Babu had commonly shared and experienced. Both of us had to face the same opponent for two consecutive terms in our respective elections. Ch. Hari Ram, an Advocate of Haryana contested against me from Rohtak Parliamentary Constituency in 1952 and 1957. He also contested for Presidentship against Rajen Babu both in 1952 and 1957.

I recall that in the election to the First Lok Sabha, my rival Ch. Hari Ram, in his election speeches used to exhort the voters to vote for him and not me, his opponent. He would caution the people: "If you elect Ranbir Singh, he will merely be a member of Lok Sabha but if you elect me, you will not only be electing your representative in parliament but the future President of India." Though Ch. Hari Ram could not win that election, he did, however, keep his word to the extent that he made unsuccessful attempt to become President of India by contesting the first presidential election against Rajen Babu.

In 1957, Ch. Hari Ram again contested against me from Rohtak but forfeited his security deposit. As usual, he filed his nomination paper against Rajen Babu also during his election for the second term: I once told Rajen Babu that while I had the honour to have the security deposit of my rival forfeited, he will not be able to achieve the same in the Presidential election. This I said because at that time no security deposit was prescribed for contesting election for the Presidentship of India. Aware of what I was hinting at, he smiled profusely.

As President of India, Rajen Babu was also the Chancellor of the Delhi University. In 1952, when I was a member of the First Lok Sabha, I thought of joining Law classes in Delhi University and for that purpose, sought admission in Evening classes. The then Dean of the University, a South Indian, refused to give me admission in Evening classes and instead offered admission as a Day scholar. Feeling angry and hurt, I wrote to Rajen Babu that I being a Parliamentarian, it would be but proper that I was given admission in Evening classes. Rajen Babu's reply, I must say, virtually stumped me. He wrote that since I had already established myself in life, I should not, by insisting on admission in Evening classes, have tried to stall the chances of others who may be in genuine need of it. Needless to say that I had to agree with the point made by him.

Rajen Babu always supported what he felt was right and proper. He was a man of principles. He had a very soft heart which really used to beat for the poor and the needy. For

instance, when he was President of the Constituent Assembly, a poor Harijan from Rewari, (then in Punjab) whose wife had been abducted, approached him for help. In the abduction of his wife, he suspected the complicity of the Zaildar of the area and therefore requested Rajen Babu to use his good offices in locating her. Rajen Babu sent that person to me. In deference to Rajen Babu's wish, I went personally to that village and using my influence, was able to locate his wife and restore her to her husband. I have mentioned this incident just to show his concern for the poor and the interest he used to evince in redressing peoples' grievances.

As occupant of the highest office of the country for 12 long years, Rajen Babu shaped the destiny of the country and rendered yeoman's service particularly during its most crucial decade after independence. He maintained the dignity, grace and prestige of the office that he held and observed constitutional properties in letter and spirit. His gentleness, simplicity, sweetness, sincerity of conviction, earnestness of purpose and above all his selflessness put him on a much higher moral pedestal. He was indeed one of the greatest and ablest sons of Mother India.

Rajen Babu: Some Glimpses

—Chaudhari Randhir Singh*

Rajendra Prasad affectionately called as Rajen Babu, was one of the pillars of our freedom movement. Though born in a remote village in the Saran district of North Bihar, he rose to the dizzy heights to become the President of the Indian Republic for two terms because of his selfless service, utmost dedication, deeprooted devotion and outstanding merit. He was indeed a symbol of humility, simplicity and gentlemanliness of the highest order.

Rajen Babu was a legend in his own right. He stood in the vanguard of the freedom movement all along. After coming into contact with Gandhiji in 1917 during the 'Champaran Satyagraha', he became his true and trusted disciple. He was every inch a Gandhian and adhered to the Gandhian values scrupulously. That was perhaps the reason why Gandhiji, amongst many of his followers, saw in him a great deal of himself. Before going to prison on sedition charges, Gandhiji passed on the responsibility of preparing the people for Satyagraha against the colonial exploitation to Rajendra Prasad. On all intricate matters he sought the counsel of Rajen Babu especially on legal and constitutional issues and his sagacious word was final. Such was the confidence and faith Mahatma had in Rajen Babu.

Rajen Babu was the very embodiment of the finest values cherished in India since times immemorial. He imbibed in

*Chaudhari Randhir Singh is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

himself the three fundamental tenets of our ancient heritage — service, renunciation and sacrifice. Not only did he firmly believe in these ethnical principles but he practised them also in his personal life. For participating in the freedom struggle, he renounced his lucrative practice, which otherwise would have earned him good fortunes. For the country, no sacrifice was big enough for this patriot. He remained behind the bars for a substantial span of his life for espousing the cause of India's Freedom. Between 1930—1945, he spent, as many as 8 years, in jails. He was always in the forefront of serving the cause of the under-privileged and neglected sections of the society. The relief work that he organised in 1934 and 1935 for the earthquake victims of Bihar and Quetta respectively was exemplary. Even the British Government commended the devotion with which he served the people. Such was the life of Rajen Babu who devoted himself entirely to the humanity.

Rājendra Prasad, along with Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel, constituted the holy trinity that characterised the Gandhian leadership of our freedom struggle. The trio also nurtured the nascent nation, with care, zeal and dexterity as the true heirs of Mahatma. Rajen Babu came into close contact with Sardar Patel during the Nagpur flag satyagraha in 1923 and later worked with him in the Partition Council set up under the Chairmanship of Lord Mountbatten to obtain for India a just and fair settlement of assets, etc. The intimate relationship that, he as the Head of the State, had with the Head of the Government, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, set a fine example worthy of emulation by his successors.

Rajen Babu was a prolific writer and had a flair for literary and journalistic pursuits. His Book '*India Divided*' speaks volumes for his knowledge, erudition and genius. His *Atmakatha*, published both in Hindi and in English deals comprehensively with the saga of our freedom struggle. Another

book — *At the feet of Mahatma* — depicts the thought and teachings of his mentor. During freedom movement, he penned several articles and edited newspapers thereby influencing the public opinion in favour of the 'Satyagraha'.

Honours and positions came in Rajen Babu's way without ever aspiring for them. The Presidentship of the Constituent Assembly was a crowning achievement for Rajen Babu. He discharged that stupendous task with profound wisdom, deftness, innate calmness and to the utmost satisfaction of every section of the Constitution making body. In this sense, it can be said that he lived a life of an *Ajat Shatru*. No wonder, on attaining independence, he became the unanimous choice for the office of the President of India. Whenever necessary, he did not fail to exercise a moderating influence in moulding the policies and actions of the Government.

As the first President of India, Rajen Babu lent dignity and grace to this exalted and highest office of the land. Along with the first Prime Minister of Free India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, he had sown in the soil of our Parliamentary polity, seeds of high quality in the form of precedents, conventions and traditions. The credit for the success of democratic system that has come to stay in India, in fact, goes partly to leaders like Dr. Rajendra Prasad who so ably steered the ship of the nation during its formative and most crucial period.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Indian Presidency

— *Somnath Rath**

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the Indian Republic, was one of the last stalwarts of the Gandhian era. His contribution to the cause of India's freedom struggle was second to none. When India became independent, he was the first choice for the highest office. His political stature, scholarship, equanimity, conscientiousness had won him a respectable place as Presiding Officer of the Constituent Assembly.

Dr. Prasad was elected as President of India on 26 January, 1952, and served, as such, till 1962. It means that he occupied this office for two consecutive terms. It goes to his credit that he had no political ambitions. There is no evidence to prove that he showed any craving for power.

Dr. Prasad took an active part in the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. He raised the issue of the powers of the President. This is apparent from his special concern during the debates on the position and powers of the President of India under the Constitution. He once asked the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Dr. Ambedkar: "Where is the provision in the draft constitution which binds the President to act in accordance with the advice of the ministers?" Dr. Ambedkar replied: "I am sure that there is provision and the provision is

*Shri Rath is a former Union Minister.

that there shall be a council of ministers to aid and advise the President in the exercise of his functions". But Dr. Prasad was not satisfied. He averred: "Since we are having this written Constitution, we must have that clearly put somewhere". He continued to express his concern at the lack of clear definition.

In a public speech, he stated that the powers of the President needed to be clearly defined in the Constitution because, in his view, an elected head of State could not be equated with the hereditary British Sovereign as the Constitution did. He observed:

"Although there are no specific provisions as far as I know, in the Constitution itself, making it binding on the President to accept the advice of his Ministers, it is hoped that the convention under which in England the King acts always on the advice of his ministers, will be established in this country also and the President not so much on account of the written word in the Constitution, but as a result of this very healthy convention, will become a constitutional President in all matters".

The position of the President under the Indian Constitution could not be more explicitly put by anyone other than the first President himself. Less than two months after he assumed the office of the President Dr. Prasad became worried as to the actual powers that he has as the Head of the State. He had already felt the effect as his position as Head of the State required him to keep aloof from active politics which had for long become his very life.

He had all the dignity, the prestige and the respect that any President could wish or aspire for, but he had no power. He once made a very interesting observation that while the Britishers in their time had kept him in prison for fighting the cause of India's freedom, now he was a prisoner of his own people. Only the prison has changed.

As the President of the Republic he addressed in March, 1950 a long and carefully-worded note to the then Prime Minister Nehru. The note covered the whole range of his doubts

as to the constitutional position of the office of the President, his functions and powers. The Prime Minister sent the note to the then Attorney General, Shri M.C. Setalvad for his legal advice. In a long Memorandum, the Attorney General gave his advice in October, 1950 making it clear that the President's position and power was more or less the same as that of the British monarch—that the king had the right to be consulted, to warn, and to encourage but no more than that. How these things could be done, must be a matter of personal equation between the President and the Prime Minister. In this regard, both Nehru and Rajendra Prasad made the best possible effort they could according to their judgement and each respected other's transparent honesty and strength of character.

Dr. Prasad, as the President, found no harm in being assertive, particularly where the Constitution empowered him to do so. For instance, when he felt that he was being ignored in the matter of high-level appointments, including those of Governors and Ambassadors, he did protest against this practice. Unhesitatingly and without mincing words, he wrote to Nehruji: "You are laying down bad precedents. A President, who did not like you, could have given a lot of trouble". The matter was discussed in the Cabinet and it was ultimately decided that the files relating to the high appointments were to be submitted to the President before issuing the final orders. Dr. Prasad did not fail to discharge his constitutional duty of warning the Government, whenever according to him it was necessary.

The strong feelings of Dr. Rajendra Prasad on the Hindu Code Bill deserve special mention. On 15 September, 1951, he wrote to the Prime Minister:

"You know that I had given public expression to my views regarding the Hindu Code Bill when I had greater freedom before I was elevated to my present position. Since my election, I have no occasion to say anything, not because I considered the matter to be more or less in the region of academic discussion. I did not think it necessary to take for discussion a highly controversial measure, if I could help it.

It seems now that Parliament is being asked to and is going to pass the Bill. I feel I owe it to you and to the Cabinet to put you in possession of my views so that you and the Cabinet may not be taken by surprise. Accordingly, in my last interview with you three days ago, I told you what I thought and felt, and in confirmation there of, I am enclosing a note for you and the Cabinet”.

In his note, he objected, in particular to the passing of part II of the Hindu Code Bill relating to intestate succession immediately before the Genral Elections.

The Prime Minister thereafter sought the opinion of the Attorney General Shri M.C. Setalvad and also that of another leading lawyer and an authority on the constitutional law, Alladi Krishnaswamy Aiyar. The Attorney-General in his reply expressed reservations on the stand taken by Dr. Prasad and the controversy thus, was laid to rest.

Dr. Prasad was convinced that as President he was not merely a figure-head. It goes, however, to his credit that he never allowed his views to be influenced by personal considerations. As a man of keen perception and sound legal knowledge, he projected a highly dignified behaviour as occupant of the highest office of the head of the State. According to V.P. Menon, among the luminaries who adorned the political firmament of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad undoubtedly was one of the most conspicuous. Pandit Nehru described Rajen Babu as one who not only occupied the highest office in the country but more than anything else, embodied in his life the Indian National Movement itself.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad : As I knew him

— *Biren Roy**

I came into contact with Rajendra Prasadji as early as in 1933 at the Calcutta Session of the Indian National Congress. Thereafter, since I was instrumental in the formation of the All Bengal Municipal Association in 1935-36, I discussed with Rajendra Prasadji my idea of having a similar organisation in Bihar, the State to which he belonged. Dr. Prasad smiled at my proposal and told me that I was 'a little leftist'. This probably he said in view of my contacts with Nehruji and Subhash Chandra Bose.

In 1936, I was elected to represent the Indian Sub-continent at the VIth World Congress of Towns and Cities held in Germany. I sought Dr. Prasad's advice as to whether I should project in that country the ideology of the Indian National Congress. He told me that since I was not going there as an official delegate of the Indian National Congress, I would do well to touch upon that as a freedom fighter. He also wished me good luck for the success of my mission. It was perhaps at the World Congress of Towns and Cities that the flag of the Indian National Congress was flown on my initiative in Europe for the first time in June 1936, alongwith the flags of other participating independent countries. I addressed the congregation extempore for about twenty minutes in German which received wide acclaim. This achievement of mine brought me closer to Subhash Bose.

*Shri Roy is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha).

In 1959, when I was in the Bengal Legislature and also Chairman of the Bengal Flying Club and the Aero Club of India, I had the privilege of organising the first National Air Rally. For this event, I had the blessings of Dr. Prasad, Pandit Nehru and Rafi Ahmad Kidwai. In the second Air Rally held at Chakeri (near Kanpur) in 1951, we had the privilege of having with us Dr. Prasad, who presided over the prize distribution function.

After 1957, since I became a member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), I have had on many occasions intimate conversations with Dr. Prasad. I even succeeded in getting a special PALLETTE Portrait of his painted by an internationally reputed portrait painter from Vienna. For this portrait, Dr. Prasad had to spare nearly two hours each for 3-4 days to be with us in the Mughal Gardens. This portrait is still with me as my prized possession.

Whosoever came in contact with Rajendra Prasadji, could not fail to see in him a man of great simplicity. Though coming from a typical rural background, he also exhibited, when occasion demanded, an urbanity of the most cultured type. As a matter of fact, his nobility was marked by an infinite contrast in his total personality. His gentleness, combined with his intellect made him an excellent negotiator. His long and continuous association with Gandhiji had a great effect on him, so much so that he started leading a very simple and unostentatious life like that of his mentor. He never concealed the fact that he was a pacifist by faith and a believer in Gandhiji's concept of non-violence. So close he was to Gandhiji that any reference to his mentor or his teachings would make him sentimental and emotional.

As President of independent India from 1950 to 1962, Dr. Rajendra Prasad gave a new direction to India's polity. A downright simple man, he was devoted entirely to the welfare of the people of India, and lent a unique dignity and grace to the high office of the President of India. He will always be remembered by the people of this great country for his sincerity of purpose and integrity of character.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: An Outstanding Personality

—*Professor Raja Ram Shastri**

Only few of us in public life are alive today who have seen and interacted with Rajen Babu and were his comrades in public life. Among a galaxy of those great personalities of the country who will inspire the coming generations to work for national unity, secularism and a socialistic society, the life and works of Rajen Babu will always be remembered.

The academic institutions like Kashi Vidyapeeth, Bihar Vidyapeeth, Gujarat Vidyapeeth and Jamia Millia were established to prepare students to come forward to help in attaining independence and work for the progress and development of a free India alongwith the great leaders of the day.

I passed Shastri examination from Kashi Vidyapeeth in 1925—the year in which many of those who passed Shastri later proved to be leaders of great fame. That year, Rajen Babu was invited to deliver the Convocation Address and for distribution of degree. The Vice-Chancellor Dr. Bhagwan Dassji, Dr. Sampurnanandji, Acharya Narendra Deviji, Babu Shiv Prasad Guptaji and Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviyaji were also present in that Convocation. the appearance and dress of Rajen Babu was peculiar. He looked like a typical Bihari peasant. He rose to deliver the Address with much reservation.

* Professor Shastri is a former Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

He said that he was somewhat reluctant to deliver his Address in the presence of such great scholars especially when revered Mahiyaji was also present.

We could not visualize at that time, that one day he would become the President of Congress and that also not once but thrice; that he would become the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly and when India will be declared a Sovereign, Democratic, Republic, he will be elected its first President.

Rajen Babu in his Convocational Address had said:

“Graduates and others of Kashi Vidyapeeth have great responsibility. You would have to win over the hostility and distrust of the oponents of national education and supporters of the British rule by intelligence, efficiency and above all by virtue of your character. You have to win the hearts of the people by true patriotism, service and selflessness. By the grace of God only you have got such an opportunity. Therefore, I consider you very fortunate. You have got the unique opportunity of interaction with revered Shri Bhagwan Dassji. A Vidyapeeth, which enjoys the munificence of Shri Shiv Prasad Gupta as its patron, cannot be wanting for anything. But, more the privileges you are availing, more is the responsibility on your shoulders”

Behind the setting up of such institutions was the farsightedness, sagacity and systematic planning of Mahatma Gandhi to attain independence for India. To implement this scheme, he had selected dedicated persons from all the States, who had the capacity to accomplish this task on timebound basis.

Gandhiji had his own criteria to assess the capacity of the people in various fields. His rules and conditions were the highlights of that criteria. He considered observance of truth and non-violence as necessary as personal character for the people engaged in nation building. He used to teach the lesson of self-dependence to them and to work in a disciplined manner was his most essential condition. In his view, only those who fulfilled these conditions were fit for the task of nation-building.

People who came forward to work with Gandhiji on these conditions, later became great leaders of India. They include gems such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Rajgopalachari and Rajendra Prasad. Their associates were also the product of the Gandhian Era.

Following Gandhiji's ideas, a crucible was prepared for moulding patriots into hardworking, truthful, self-dependent men of sound character.

Rajen Babu inculcated the spirit of democracy in the masses through his ideas and deeds. He was the first President of India. He had strengthened its foundation for more than twelve years through his words and deeds. That is why, our democracy is considered to be the best in the world. The present state of democracy is the gift of Rajen Babu and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Ardhanarishwar of Indian Politics

—*Professor Sideshwar Prasad**

While, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the political heir of the Father of the Nation-Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave was the spiritual one. The personality of Bharat Ratna Dr. Rajendra Prasad was identical to that of a character that would have emerged, had Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru followed the constructive work of Gandhiji and Vinoba Bhave entered into active politics. Rajendra Babu was a politician amongst saints and a saint amongst politicians. Gandhiji called him 'Ajatshatru' (one who has no enemy). When the leadership of the Indian National Congress was in the vortex of crisis due to internal bickerings, it was Rajendra Prasad who took charge of the Congress and guided the country. He had a remarkable sense of adjustment of qualities which at times seemed to be controversial. Obviously he appeared to be a villager but he was a man of extraordinary talent and he always stood first in the examination right from Matriculation till M.A. He was very soft-spoken and courteous. In times of need, however, he was as strong as steel. Though he lived in the most splendid palace, 'Rashtrapati Bhawan', his detachment to it was more than that of a saint. He was the Head of the executive and the Prime Minister and Cabinet could function only till his discretion. But he never gave importance to his personal likings and dislikings while taking decisions. He always kept the national interest uppermost and nurtured the dignity of the high office. During

*Professor Sideshwar Prasad is a former Union Minister.

the period of childhood of Indian democracy, had there been a person other than Rajendra Babu, as the Chairman of Constituent Assembly or the first President of India, there would not have emerged such an eminent element in Indian politics nor it would have been possible to maintain the dignity of democracy which is so deep rooted in the Indian tradition that even the stormy turmoil of the neighbouring countries have failed to shake the same. Goswami Tulsidas has written some verses with reference to 'Bharat':

*"Tehipur Basat Bharat Binu Raga.
Chanchreek Jimi Champak Baga."*

(Ram Charit Manas)

That is "Bharat (Brother of Lord Rama) lived in that palace without any attachment just as the buzzing bee lived in the garden full of champak trees."

Gandhiji's spiritualism was evident when he spoke only "Hey Ram" when he was shot at and the chanchrik type detachment of Rajendra Babu was proved when he went back to the same Sadaquat Ashram from where he had gone to Rashtrapati Bhawan. No top-most leader, except Rajendra Babu returned to his Ashram (place of service) after attaining such a distinguished position. Though it appears to be a simple thing but certainly it is a very difficult one. Under similar circumstances Tulsidas had said:

*"Janam Janam Muni Jatan Karahi
Ant Ram Kahi Aawat Nahi."*

Rajendra Babu was a strong supporter and a true devotee of Gandhiji. After 1915, when Gandhiji returned from South Africa and reached Calcutta, Rajendra Babu met him for the first time. Thereafter, he met him in the Congress meeting held in 1916 at Lucknow. Incidentally, in 1917, when Mahatma Gandhi had to launch Satyagraha for months together with a view to solve the

problems of the peasants of Champaran and Rajendra Babu worked with him throughout as his right-hand man along with other leaders like Maulana Mazrul-Haq, Brij Kishore Prasad etc., a relation of teacher and the taught developed between Gandhiji and Rajendra Babu which not only continued but became deeper and deeper throughout their lifetime. Only Rajendra Babu, among the top most politicians, remained in the company of Gandhiji for the longest spell and he was the only leader who authored a book on his constructive programme. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Rajendra Babu was the true follower of constructive politics of Gandhiji and never distanced political affairs from humanism.

Rajendra Babu was relieved from the office of President on 12 May, 1962. Two days prior to that *i.e.* on 10 May, a farewell function had been organised by the citizens of India, which was an unprecedented one. The Ramleela Maidan was thronged by a mammoth crowd. The Maidan was so filled to the capacity that there was hardly any place left. Referring to it on another occasion Dinkarjee had said 'a person is always welcomed when he assumes office but nobody commands respect while relinquishing office.' Rajendra Babu was, however, an exception to it and he was given a tearful farewell and people were overwhelmed with sadness.

The world is dialectical and it gets energy and power out of it. This quality has been given the name of truth-untruth, man-woman, solvent-insolvent, light-dark, God-demon and so on. According to the Indian tradition, 'Ardhanarishwar' is recognised as its supreme expression. It is considered that *Bhav* or *Shiva* and *Bhawani* or *Parvati* are the same. Both are identical. Kalidasa has described this in his poetry as *Vagarthaviv Sampriktau* and Tulsidas says that the creator and creation are one *Lakhiyat Bhinna na bhinna*. Babu Rajendra Prasad was a living *Ardhanarishwar* of modern Indian politics. In the context of Shri Ram, Bhavabhuti has said that he (Ram) was softer than a flower and harder than a stone. Without this, upliftment of the weaker sections and crushing the wicked persons was not possible. When the man or the society

becomes softer, then the same becomes spineless and when it acquires more than the required hardness, the same becomes cruel. It is not possible to accomplish '*Rajdharma*' in any of the two situations. Rajendra Babu had the golden combination of the two and demonstrated it with his conduct and behaviour as the first citizen of the country.

It has been said in Gita that people follow the conduct of those who are excellent persons. Why the glow of character and conduct is not visible today in modern India where great men like Shri Ram Krishna Param Hansa, Swami Dayanand, Swami Vivekanand, Lokmanya Tilak, Yogi Arvind, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabh Bhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, Abul Kalam Azad, Subhash Chandra Bose, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Jai Prakash Narian, Ram Manohar Lohia, Narendra Dev etc. were born? Why the common people appear to be depressed due to increasing corruption in public life? Why is there an atmosphere of distrust, hatred, violence and terrorism all around? Why the emotional integration of the nation seems to be weakening instead of becoming stronger? Why pigmies are occupying the positions of giants and why wickeds are achieving their objects by manoeuvring in the public life? Why the followers of truth and non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi are being made to run from pillar to post?

It cannot be said that on assuming power after freedom, our top leaders did not feel its impact. No leader except Rajendra Babu tried to accept it or ponder over it in depth.

Mahatma Gandhi had opposed western materialistic civilization and had strongly supported the intellectual tradition of Indian civilisation in '*Hind Swaraj*' (1909). He was of the opinion that instead of following the traditions of Europe, we will have to find out our way of life within our traditions and customs.

But after attaining freedom, leaders of India, completely forgot the lesson taught by Gandhiji. In this connection, Rajendra Babu has written:

“Now the more I think, the more I found myself impressed by Mahatma Gandhi’s farsightedness and wisdom in this regard. Today we are independent and the fate of our country is in our hands. However, due to weakness in our education system and our mental shackles, we have not been able to get rid of the European influence. Even today, we judge the things according to European standards.”

—*Bapu Ke Kadamon Mein*

Even after independence, Lord Macaulay won and Mahatma Gandhi got defeated. That is why the national schools and colleges established by Mahatma Gandhi had to be closed due to lack of assistance by the free Government of India and the schools, colleges and universities set up by Lord Macaulay are prospering with full assistance of the Government.

Elaborating this point further Rajendra Babu said:

“Today we have the right to enact legislation of our choice. But the draft that we have prepared is on the pattern of western legislations. In these legislations no such provision has been made about which we can say that these legislations give something new to the world. Nevertheless, we want that the country should progress in every direction but don’t we require education and character for this purpose. If these are required, we are not making any special provision in this regard because we do not find any instance of this type in Western legislations”.

The conclusion is that we have accepted the fact that progress can be made only on the lines followed by European countries and in consequence thereof we have become victims of two weaknesses—firstly, like Europe, we too got entangled into the clutches of the hedonistic culture, secondly, the separate identity and luminosity of independent India did not manifest itself. We forgot that the entire world had welcomed the sublime thoughts of spiritualism of Rabindranath Tagore and did not regard those poets who were imitating the West.

The West had also saluted the half-naked saint of India and not the suit-clad aristocratic Gandhi. It is a bitter fact and the history stands testimony to it that country can hardly survive by keeping aside its traditions, culture and history and it will have to find way towards progress from its own culture and traditions only. Those who were not conscious of this fact, lost their identity with the passage of time. The downfall of Greece, Egypt and Rome are its glaring examples. India was rejuvenated due to Gandhiji's efforts. But are we such heirs of Gandhiji who will ruin this country?

Be it the Indian Brahmin tradition or Shraman tradition, equal emphasis has been laid on truth, non-violence, sacrifice, penance, brahmacharya, renunciation etc., in both the traditions. A person who develops these qualities is a man in the true sense. India will lose its identity if it gives up this great tradition and only due to this belief, Rajendra Babu had supported the inclusion of Indian values in the educational system and perhaps after Gandhiji nobody strived as hard to awaken the country on this issue as he did. But his words remained a lone voice in the wilderness because at that point of time, people were overpowered by the western materialistic way of life. India is suffering its adverse effects today also and it will suffer in the future too. It may perhaps lose its identity, and then it may become difficult even to identify India.

In Indian traditions, Lord Rama has been regarded as Maryada Purushottam because he held the importance of character as utmost importance in his life. Norms for personal life and public life were not different for him, as they were in Europe. Defining the eleven 'Vrats' (Fasts) of Gandhiji, Rajendra Babu had said that:

"His experiments regarding food habits, experiments regarding health care etc., brahmacharya and the basic principle of life 'truth and non-violence' all are interconnected. Nobody can understand them in isolation, leave aside practising them in life. His aim was to form a society based on these principles. That is why his

politics were not different from his religion. Similarly, personal life cannot be viewed separately from public life”.

Due to ignorance of this subtle difference between the Indian traditions and the European traditions, generally Chanakya is compared with Machiavelli. Machiavelli believed that the ultimate goal of politics is victory and one should try to achieve it by hook or by crook and one should not hesitate in indulging in fair or foul means such as cunningness, dodging and duplicity for this purpose. On the contrary Chanakya believed that the success of politics lies in conquering yourself.

In Gandhiji's view, the only aim of all the activities of life was realisation of God. He believed that truth is God and non-violence is the other aspect of this truth. Therefore, it is evident that Gandhiji was the supporter of the politics of Indian society. The gist of the life and thinking of Rajendra Babu was that if we want to make our life meaningful, then we will have to peep into every aspect of our life and ascertain whether any antipathy is raising its head against the teachings of Gandhiji. Are we ready to prove our personal and public life true to these ideals? Do we have such a deep faith in the Indian traditions that we proceed firmly on the principle of unity of life?

How did Rajendra Babu's life become a manifestation of Gandhian thoughts? He himself has written: “I had got several opportunities of sitting on the feet of Mahatmaji, hearing him talk and observing his life from a very close range”. Gita says that only he gets the knowledge who has a real pursuit for it. Rajendra Babu was a rare person among such persons in having pursuit of knowledge. In the real sense of the word 'Upanishad', he always followed his teacher, Gandhiji. That is why, his primary source of inspiration never diminished and remained unattached. He went on practising *Karmyoga* till the last moment of his life.

As the Chairman of Municipality, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in Allahabad, Sardar Patel in Ahmedabad and Rajendra Babu in Patna, accepted the public office for the first time in their public life which gave them an opportunity to know the intricacies of

civil administration. In the changed political climate of today, no one wants to start his public life from the Municipality; leave aside the Panchayat. As a result, inexperienced persons, after suddenly becoming a Minister or a Chief Minister take over the reins of administration and due to lack of experience all traditions and conventions are thrown to the wind. This is a situation that causes concern.

I am referring to this matter, because under democracy, power depends on public support, which should be derived through public service and not by using monetary power indiscriminately or taking recourse to unfair means as is the practice these days. In the absence of a mass public support, democracy has no meaning and ultimately public resentment takes an explosive turn.

By starting their public career as the Chairman of Municipality, Pt. Nehru, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Babu tried to mould themselves according to that public opinion which is the real source of power in democracy, because it is based on public welfare (Gita). Therefore, it automatically creates power for egalitarianism. (*Yogakshemam Vahamyaham—Gita*). When public-opinion is not allowed to develop and leadership is imposed from above ignoring the public opinion and the opinion of local leaders, the public base and moral authority underlying democracy do not exist at all. The greatest drawback of the Indian democracy is that local bodies do not function on the basis of democratic norms and the parties impose on themselves, the candidates from above. In this system, all the defects of the democratic centralisation of Marxism are present, but like Marxist parties, the central leadership is never prepared to share all the responsibilities. The system of commanding all authority by central leadership and putting all blame on local leadership in case of failures has made this democracy totally ineffective.

Rajendra Babu was not unaware of this looming danger to democracy. In his last address to the joint session of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha as President of India, he had stated that the expenditures on elections were continually increasing

and that was the greatest danger for the healthy development of the Indian democracy. If huge amounts of money are spent during the general elections and central leadership bears the responsibility to collect that money, it is natural that all the power will be centralised in the central leadership which amounts to a mockery of democracy. In this way, monetary power has affected the growth of Indian democracy more than it has affected western democracies and the leadership of every party has become the greatest enemy to democracy by violating democratic norms repeatedly.

Rajendra Babu said that Gandhiji had taught them that politics without moral values was like a body without soul. He had written : "Truthful behaviour is impossible without non-violence, and the relation of both is inseparable." Everybody believes and says that God is true, but Gandhiji postulated only one way to know and identify God, and that was the way of truth. He always used to say that there is no difference between the means and the end. Not only did he identify God as truth, but truth as God too. This belief is the very foundation of Indian tradition and politics and the violation of this fundamental renders Indian politics a mere imitation of Western politics which can never solve the real problems of the Indian populace. Though independent India has witnessed tremendous material developments, yet the incidence of frustration in Indian politics and administration has been increasing perpetually due to deteriorating moral standards. High passion and violence have intensified to an extent where nobody is ready to listen to the reasoning of wisdom. Every citizen of the country appears to have gone into a frenzy to acquire maximum material comforts. Everyone wants to secure maximum financial gains which implies that those who possess the keys to the coffer hold the fate of democracy in their hands. You may call it a democracy, but Rajendra Babu had put a question mark to it.

Renowned American socialist and philosopher, Sorokin has written that the sacrifice-oriented era promote civilisation and culture while the era of materialism cause their downfall. The period commencing from Shri Ramakrishna Paramhans to

Mahatma Gandhi was the period of sacrifice and hence our civilization and culture got a fillip. But the period that followed was the period of materialism which endangered the downfall of our culture and civilisation. It will not be an easy task to find an answer to the conclusion of the Sorokin's analysis. Rajendra Babu had repeatedly forewarned the countrymen of the every-increasing dangers of materialistic pursuits.

For the balanced and complete upliftment of human-life, a holistic development of social, economical, administrative, cultural and spiritual process is necessary. But this does not mean that there is no other power than the power to rule. Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Lok Nayak Jaiprakash Narayan never remained in power but is it necessary to mention that the persons in power always sought gratification while sitting in front of their feet. Why? State rule is an animal power and saintly power is the moral force. The coordinated and balanced growth of all organs of the society takes place only when both are complementary to each other. But when they assume contradictory postures the process of public welfare gets vitiated. In such a situation, due to the process 'stagnation', the society loses its digestive power and starts disintegrating.

Sri Ram of Tulsidasji said:—

["Jaun Aniti Kachhu Bhasaun Bhai, Tow Mohin Barjahu Bhay Bisrai"].

It is evident from this that it would be more appropriate to term the politics of public welfare as the public policy. Actual power lies in justice and fearlessness. Where there is injustice and where there is fear, there can not be a healthy development of democracy.

Rajendra Babu even as a politician neither deviated from the path of justice nor did he hesitate to speak the truth for the sake of his personal interest. His personality was an ideal combination of the delicacy of flowers and hardness of *Vajra*. That is why I call him an *Ardharishwar* of Modern Indian Politics. Softness was perceived in his words and nature but his

hardness was reflected in not deviating from the path of truth and non-violence in all circumstances. The ideal line of Laxman which he drew as a President has proved to be the armour of Indian democracy. We have to think over it repeatedly.

The basis of politics is justice but what is the basis of justice? The base of justice is spiritualism. I am not using the word 'religion' here deliberately. Now a days the word 'religion' is used mainly in a communalistic sense and today, in that very sense use of the word '*Dharam Nirpeksh*' (Secular) has achieved prevalence. This is not that '*Sanatan Dharma* which embraces everything and which according to *Manusmriti*, has ten characteristics. It was further improved by Gandhiji and was given the shape of "commandments" and transformed them into the basis of national service. The communal form of religion being parochial and fanatic, it creates an atmosphere of passion and violence. There is also a non-communal form of religion in which a person individually and collectively following a system aspires for happiness instead of sorrow in this world and in heaven. The ultimate and the highest form of spiritualism is that man feels oneness with God then he rises above all worldly differences and acknowledges that oneness and emancipation from the sense of possessiveness and coveting. He neither feels happy on gaining anything nor unhappy over losing anything. The politics followed by such a '*Karmyogi*' who is free of the bondages of life, is for public welfare and basically based on spiritualism. It never deviates from the path of justice at the time of difficulty. Based on such spiritual meaning of religion Mahatama Gandhi and Rajendra Babu inter-linked religion and politics and Rajendra Babu always used to say that we should necessarily link politics with character-building. Even the skill and efficiency of a person can not bring prosperity to a nation if he is a scoundrel and a manipulator.

An era of unprecedented changes in politics has ushered in this last decade of 20th century. During the first seven decades of this century the Marxists took it upon themselves to build a new civilization by resorting to violence and centralisation of power but today the very same means are destroying it. The

powers which pioneered the division of Germany about five decades ago are now playing an active role in its unification. It appears that the first round of politics of violence has been completed.

Rajendra Babu always maintained that division of India was not the solution of communal problems in this country. The concept of two nations on which Pakistan was founded, was contrary to historical facts, unviable, against humanity, unethical and against the basic concept of spirituality as it is based on falsehood and violence. But the division is not based on communal violence and politics of manipulation but to bring in firmly a sense of non-violence, love, truth and harmony in the Indian life-style.

The totality of life lies in the concept of '*Ardnarishwar*' which is an endeavour of transforming the dead into living. Upnishads say that this is a herculian task. We obtained freedom while following this principle. At that juncture lakhs of people used to sing the following lines of the song of '*Bismil*':—

*"Sar farosi ki tammanna Ab Hamare Dil Mein hai
Dekhna hai Jor Kitna Bajue-Katil Mein Hai."*

We won freedom but our enemy divided our nation and we forgot these last lines of the poet:

*"E Shahedo-mulko-millet, tere jazboke Nisar,
Teri Kurbari ka charcha gair ki mehfil mein hai.,,*

After independence, the persons responsible for dividing the country are taking pride in creating discord instead of harmony amongst people. Everywhere the topic of discussion is that who is responsible for the sentiments of the people and creation of violence and terror and spreading falsehood.

Jan-Nisar Akhtar has said:—

'Yah wakt khone ka nahin, yah wakt sone ka nahin Jago watan khatre mein hai, sara chaman khatre main hai'.

Political forces are now instigating religious, linguistic, caste and regional and communal feelings and trying to spread their influence. If every Indian thinks of his self-interests only then who will take care of the Nation and Society? The life and work of Dr. Rajendra Prasad might work as a guiding factor in this hour of national and international crisis provided we act wisely, remain awake and work according to the voice of our conscience.

Rajen Babu: Humility in Greatness

— Satyendra Narayan Sinha*

It was in 1926 I got the first opportunity to meet Rajen Babu. Mahatma Gandhi had gone to Aurangabad. I and my brother were among the privileged few to be allowed to climb the dais to touch the Mahatma's feet. Rajendra Babu introduced us to Gandhiji.

Eventhough I was very young, I was struck by Rajendra Babu's simplicity. His unostentatious living had already marked him out from some of his other colleagues. A brilliant lawyer, he could have amassed wealth in the manner of the top advocates of those days. But Rajendra Babu chose to live a simple life in the Congress headquarters, Sadaquat Ashram and live the commune life with other ashramites in the true Gandhian style.

This routine remained unchanged even after he was elected Chairman of the Patna Municipality. Rajendra Babu would go to the Municipal office along with his Vice-Chairman Anugrah Babu a distance of 12 km in an *ekka*, a horse driven cart. There was no show, no pretentiousness about it.

Rajendra Babu was also distinguished by the great affection he had for the thousands who took part in the independence struggle. For him they were members of his family. And his life in the Ashram itself was an underpinning of that concept — of the leader and the led living together and sharing the common concerns. This helped him to develop a strong bond with his

*Shri Sinha is a former Chief Minister of Bihar.

compatriots and to lead them through the tremendous trials of the freedom movement.

He was also known for his tolerance and forbearance. He never lost his temper and could keep his cool even under provocation. I remember one small incident. His tailor who also happened to be a Congress worker once stitched Rajendra Babu's jacket of woollen cloth with the two arms cut from different cloth. The tailor, Ramdas, realised his mistake only too late. But he acknowledged it. So far as Rajendra Babu was concerned he did not give another thought to it. He took the jacket and kept it with him and wore it during the winter.

This extreme simplicity and absence of sophistication contrasted strongly with his brilliant and almost photographic memory. His academic record was also brilliant. But this never showed in his demeanour. To those who were not familiar with him, he conveyed the image of an ordinary peasant without much education. Because of his moustache and heavy cheeks, he even gave a different impression.

The journalist John Gunther wrote about him that a member of the British Parliamentary Delegation on a visit to Central Jail, Hazaribagh while passing by the cell occupied by Rajendra Babu mis-took him to be a criminal type and said so. The savant from Bihar merely smiled at this observation. John Gunther further wrote that the delegation obviously did not know that here was a scholar who spoke seven languages.

I once had an opportunity to appear before him in an arbitration proceeding. The dispute related to a limestone mine. Several Chemists including some professors had appeared before him from either side and produced many books in support of their contentions. When he was writing the judgement after hearing both sides for several days even-though he was ill, I was by his side. He had no steno-typist. The judgement running into 200 pages he wrote by his own hand. I was amazed to see him writing almost non-stop without ever referring to the several books and case laws

produced before him. Such was his grasp and understanding as also his memory.

Ever since he came into contact with Gandhiji during the Champaran Satyagraha, Rajendra Babu had given up his career at the Bar and had devoted himself completely to the cause of freedom. His faith in Gandhiji was total, and so too his faith in truth and non-violence. It was unquestioning and unflinching. His life was an open book in which events were written in Gandhian words and deeds. His doors were open to all, high and low and they went to see him and were inspired by his soft and sincere words which touched their hearts. He was the Ajatshatru — the man who had no enemies. He harboured no ill will towards anyone. He was acceptable to all. And Gandhiji used this to bring him to the centre of the stage whenever there was a dispute in the party. When Subhas Babu resigned after Haripura Congress, Rajendra Babu was chosen the congress candidate. And again when Acharya Kripalani resigned, Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel turned to Rajendra Babu to accept the Presidentship, even-though he was carrying the onerous responsibility of the Presidentship of the Constituent Assembly. But the Presidentship made no difference to his work; only he worked harder.

Humility was the essence of his personality. So much so he attributed all his own achievements to Gandhiji's inspiration. Gandhiji had realised Rajendra Babu's value as a person gifted with an analytical mind and an incisive one. So he would take Rajendra Babu into confidence whenever some of the tough problems of the movement posed themselves. He was in constant demand at Wardha where Gandhiji operated. But Rajendra Babu never made a show of that closeness to Gandhiji. Instead, he took it as a call of duty and did his job silently. It is upto historians to assess whether his contribution has been properly acknowledged. My own impression is that this was not so.

True, Rajendra Babu and Panditji did not see eye to eye on many issues. Rajendra Babu was deeply religious and had great respect for Hindu traditions. But Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan

who knew Rajendra Babu closely and intimately, being together in Hazaribagh Central Jail, described him as a man who was above narrow considerations and made no distinction between man and man. It is this quality of Rajendra Babu which did not permit the differences in religious beliefs and thinking with those of Pandit Nehru to interfere in working together in laying a firm foundation of our nascent democracy. He was careful not to tread beyond his constitutional rule. Yet Panditji himself acknowledged his contribution not only in consolidating freedom and unity of the country but also laying down such traditions which have strengthened the roots of freedom and democracy.

Rajendra Babu being a man of the masses, felt almost caged in the Rashtrapati Bhawan. He suffered from inner conflict at not being able to play as effective and active role as he could have. And he gave vent to his feeling of joy on laying down office of the Rashtrapati even as a student feels happy on leaving for home on the closure of schools. Let us leave that to history to judge and evaluate. It is the greatness of the man that makes us stand in awe and reverence and inspires because it is of such mettle that the leadership of the freedom movement was made of. It is to be hoped that Mother India would throw up such great men at crucial moments in our history.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Life, Work and Ideology

—Dr. Sawai Singh Sisodia*

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was an outstanding leader and a true exponent of Gandhian philosophy, who became a legend in his own lifetime. Often remembered as the 'child of destiny' and commonly known and affectionately addressed as Rajen Babu, he was born on 3 Decemeber, 1884, a year before the birth of the 'Indian National Congress', in 'Zeradei'—a far flung village of Bihar, in the district of Saran.

His forefathers, who belonged to a Kayastha family of habitually social and traditionally scholars, had migrated from Amroha (U.P.) and settled in Zeradei, led a simple life like others and enjoyed the status of Zamindars.

Rajen Babu started his early lessons from a *Maulvi* in Persian and later learnt Hindi, Sanskrit and English with equal zeal. In his childhood, Rajendra Prasad acquired a deep knowledge of Hindu, Muslim and Christian cultures and literature, which left a mixed and deep imprint on his young mind.

Having finished his school education from Chapra District School with laurels, he joined the presidency College at Calcutta for higher education where he stood 1st in the University. He remained completely unaffected by the altogether different and fast life of a Metropolis like Calcutta, as compared

*Dr. Sisodia is a former Union Minister.

to the simple and unpretentious life in the rural surroundings of Chapra, and maintained always the 1st position in all the examinations upto M.A. He was very much loved by teachers and students alike. Some of the well-known scientists like Dr. J.C. Bose (physics) and Dr. P.C. Ray (Chemistry) were his teachers in the presidency College.

Apart from his brilliant college career, young Prasad also learnt lessons of social service through the 'Dawn Society' founded by Satish Chander Mukherjee, a contemporary of Swami Vivekananda. In order to provide help and guidance to students from his province, he started a 'Bihari Club' at Calcutta in 1906. This led to the formation of 'Bihari Students Conference', the first students conference in India that blazed a new trail. The Students trained by this organisation later proved to be the trusted soldiers of the Indian National Congress.

In the 1906 session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta, Rajen Babu had the unique opportunity to come face to face with ace leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh, Pherozezshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, which left a great and powerful impact on his mind.

After taking his M.A. Degree in 1907, he was greatly upset due to the death of his father and was undecided about his career. Instead of going to London for appearing in the I.C.S. Examination, he chose to join a Muzaffarpur College as Professor, where he was selected as Principal a year later.

Since he had an inclination for law, he again left for Calcutta to study the subject. As usual, he topped in B.L. Degree and started practice at the Calcutta High Court.

Impressed by his brilliance, an eminent Judge of the Calcutta High Court, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, who was also the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, offered him the post of Professor in the Law College. In the meanwhile, a significant incident took place. Rajen Babu was introduced to Gopal Krishna Gokhle founder of the 'Servants of India Society', who prevailed upon him to join the Society for service of humanity

and leave practice. He chose to make his services available to the needs of the nation *vis—à—vis* personal and family needs. Informing his brother, Mahendra Prasad, about his wish to leave the flourishing practice, and pleading the cause of 300 million people of the country he wrote: "...in this transitory world... all passes away...Wealth, Rank, Honour...A poor man with his few rupees is more contented than the rich man with his millions. Let us then not despise poverty. The greatest men of the world have been the poorest...". How true his prophetic forecast about himself was to be proved in later years.

In spite of his readiness to sacrifice his profession for the cause of service to the humanity, he could not join Gokhale's Society due to family reasons. Though distressed for that reason, he started working with all earnestness with legal luminaries of the time, such as Dr. Rash Bihari Bose and Sir S.P. Sinha (later Lord Sinha) at the Calcutta High Court. While remaining socially active, he also did his post graduation in law.

Due to his involvement and leading role in various activities connected with the students organisation, he was elected as a member of the All India Congress Committee in which capacity he participated in the Annual Session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta in 1911.

Rajen Babu was amongst the closest companions of Gandhiji during his historic Champaran Mission, undertaken against exploitation of thousands of peasants and for redressal of their grievances suffered by them at the hands of Indigo planters—the English-men settled in Champaran who were fully supported by the authorities.

The Champaran public rose with massive strength to the call of civil disobedience movement started for their cause. It took Gandhiji, Rajen Babu and others full one year to win the battle. It was the first experiment of Satyagrah in India. Under extreme pressure of such a public awakening, the government appointed a Commission to look into the peasants grievances and Gandhiji was asked to serve on it. As result of the Commission's report, the main grievances were remedied and

the planters got the biggest jolt when they lost their foothold in Champaran. The Champaran struggle awakened political consciousness in the whole of Bihar and gave the first lesson of civil disobedience to the country to win freedom.

In 1918, Rajen Babu started publication of an English biweekly "*Searchlight*" which gained great popularity in Bihar and is still being brought out as a Daily. He also started "*Desh*"—a weekly in Hindi in 1920. Both of them were warmly welcomed.

When Mahatma Gandhi started the historic non-cooperation movement, Rajen Babu as his most trusted lieutenant led the movement in Bihar as a spokesman of the peasants and a leader of the students. Rising always more than equal to the occasion, Rajen Babu showed unparalleled devotion, sincerity, farsightedness and organisational skill in offering satyagrahas, campaigning for civil disobedience, and Swaraj Movements, working for Harijan welfare and organising relief and rehabilitation work in times of widespread miseries caused as a result of unprecedented earthquakes, flood havocs etc.

He took keen interest in labour movement, organised in the industrial centres and undertook extensive tours in the country aimed at awakening the people and preaching the principles of non-violence, love and equality. He also travelled abroad as a good will missionary preaching non-violence and universal brotherhood to strengthen the anti-war movement.

As a freedom fighter, he suffered imprisonment on several occasions.

His selfless dedication to the cause of the nation had endeared him so much to the public and the leaders that soon he began to be counted as one of the foremost and towering public leaders of the country. He was the unanimous choice as President of the Indian National Congress when Subhash Chandra Bose resigned from its presidentship in 1939.

In 1947, Rajen Babu, who had been inducted into the Central Cabinet as Food & Agriculture Minister of the interim government, was invited to Raau in Madhya Pradesh at the

Sarvodaya Conference. As General Secretary of the District Congress Committee at Ujjain, I was joined by a number of Congress leaders and prominent persons of the area to approach Dr. Rajendra Prasad to spare sometime to visit our native place Barnagar and the adjoining rural areas in Madhya Pradesh. Dr. Rajendra Prasad readily agreed. We were indeed very happy to find a very kindly and affectionate father-figure amidst us, discussing our problems, paying due attention while listening to everybody and advising suitably in various matters and problems like drinking water, housing, agriculture, rural development and so on. We felt extremely honoured and were happy to see his unassuming behaviour, utter simplicity and above all the humane touch in his conversation.

From 1946 to 1949, Dr. Rajendra Prasad graced the Constituent Assembly as its President and deftly handled its deliberations and members' conflicting points of view. On many occasions, he brought about conciliation between them by his sober and sagacious advice.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was unanimously elected in 1952 as the First President of the largest democracy and was re-elected in 1957.

I had the unique opportunities of meeting the First Citizen of India during his tenure as Rashtrapati and found him very polite and affectionate. I always found him very inquisitive about execution and implementation of rural development plans.

After relinquishing the highest office on 13 May 1962, Rajan Babu proceeded to Sadaquat Ashram, the place he had chosen for spending the remaining part of his life. On 28 February 1963, at Sadaquat Ashram, this devoted soul left for his heavenly abode.

He was rightly conferred "BHARAT RATNA", the highest civilian award of the country, in 1963.

The Nation will ever remain indebted to him for the footprints that he left to be followed in times to come.

PART THREE

His Ideas

**(Excerpts from some select Speeches of
Dr. Rajendra Prasad in Constituent
Assembly / Parliament)**

On Election As President Of Constituent Assembly*

Brothers and sisters, pardon me if I say that I feel overwhelmed with the burden you have placed on my shoulders by entrusting me with this most important duty. By electing me for this high rank you have bestowed upon me an honour which is the highest honour for an Indian. Allow me to say that in this country of castes and creeds, you have, as it were, cast me out of your caste. Depriving me of a seat among yourselves you have compelled me to sit on a different Chair, and it does not end there. I believe all of you expect me to do nothing in this House which will show that I belong to a particular party or sect; you will expect that whatever I do here, will be done in a spirit of service to you all. I shall try to carry the honour conferred on me in a manner which will gladden the hearts of all of my brethren and my elder sister here, who have felicitated me at this occasion. I am aware that my path is beset with obstacles. The work of this Constituent Assembly is most arduous. Various problems will come before it and it will be confronted with questions which will not yield easily to solution. I know I will not be able to solve them but I have full confidence in you that you will help me at each step with the same kindness and liberality with which you have elected me here.

The Constituent Assembly is meeting at a most critical time. We all know that other constituent assemblies, whenever and wherever they met, were confronted with similar difficulties. They had also to contend with internal differences which were

*Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. I, 11 December, 1946.

placed before them with great vehemence. We also know that many of these constituent assemblies were held amidst strife and bloodshed; even their proceedings were conducted amidst quarrels and fights. In spite of all these obstacles those assemblies carried on their work to the end. Their members joined together and with courage, kindness, generosity, tolerance and regard for one another's feelings, framed constitutions which were then readily accepted by the people of the countries for which they were framed. Even at this time the people of those countries consider them their most valuable possession. There is no reason why our Constituent Assembly in spite of the obstructions in its way should not succeed in doing its work. If we are sincere, if we respect each other's opinion, we shall develop so much insight that we will not only be able to understand each others thoughts, but also be able to go deep to the root and understand each others real troubles. We will then function in a manner that no one will give any one cause to think that he has been ignored or that his opinion has not been respected. If this comes to pass and if this strength is born in us, I have full faith that in spite of all obstruction we will succeed in our work.

This Constituent Assembly has come into being with a number of limitations, many of which we will have to bear in mind as we proceed. But, it must also be borne in mind that the Assembly is a sovereign body and is fully competent to conduct its proceedings in the manner it chooses to follow. No out-side power can meddle with its proceedings. I also believe that it is competent to break the limitations attached to it at its birth. It should be our effort to get free of these limitations and frame a constitution which will assure all men and women of this country, no matter of what religion, province or shade of opinion, that their rights are fully protected. If such an effort is made in this House and we succeed in it, I believe that it will be such a landmark in the history of the world that it will be hard to rival.

It is also to be remembered and we, who are present in the House, cannot forget it even for a moment that many of the

seats are vacant in this meeting. Our brethren of the Muslim League are not with us and then absence increase our responsibility. We shall have to think at each step what would they have done if they were here? We have to proceed keeping all these things in view. We hope they will soon come and take their places and share in the deliberations for framing a Constitution for their country which will give it freedom, that they will join us in our march for freedom. But if unfortunately these seats continue to remain unoccupied, it will be our duty to frame a Constitution which will leave no room for complaint from anybody.

We have been fighting for the freedom of our country for a long time. This Constituent Assembly has been brought into existence by three forces: first, the sacrifice of our patriots. Many men and women gave their lives, bore hardships and persecution and after hard and continuous struggles ushered in the present stage. Second the history of the British nation; their selfishness and their generosity. Third, the present world conditions and serious situation and the forces that are raging in the world. All these combined together to bring into being our Constituent Assembly. These forces will continue functioning while we are proceeding with our work. It is quite possible that some of them may draw us to one side and others to the other side. I am however, confident that success will be ours. I pray to God that he may give us foresight, so that we may understand each other's mind, and that united together, we may free our country.

I thank my brothers and sisters who have congratulated me. I was over-whelmed with embarrassment and I wished I had not been present during their speeches. I once more thank you all for the inspiring sentiments that have been expressed. I assure you that in the proceedings of this House, I shall freely give you what-ever strength God has bestowed upon me, whatever little wisdom has been given to me and whatever experience of the world I have. In return I hope you will unstintingly give me the help that you can give me.

Freedom At Midnight

In this solemn hour of our history when after many years of struggle we are taking over the governance of this country, let us offer our humble thanks to the Almighty Power that shapes the destinies of men and nations and let us recall in grateful remembrance the services and sacrifices of all those men and women, known and unknown who with smiles on their face walked to the gallows or faced bullets on their chests, who experienced living death in the cells of the Andamans or spent long years in the prisons of India, who preferred voluntary exile in foreign countries to a life of humiliation in their own, who not only lost wealth and property but cut themselves off from near and dear ones to devote themselves to the achievement of the great objective which we are witnessing today.

Let us also pay our tribute of love and reverence to Mahatma Gandhi who has been our beacon light, our guide and philosopher during the last thirty years or more. He represents that undying spirit in our culture and make-up which has kept India alive through vicissitudes of our history. It is he who pulled us out of the slough of despond and despair and blowed into us a spirit which enabled us to stand up for justice; to claim our birth-right of freedom and placed in our hands the matchless and unfailing weapon of Truth and Non-violence which without arms and armaments has won for us the invaluable prize of Swaraj at a price which, when the history of these times comes to be written, will be regarded as incredible for a vast country of our size and for the teeming millions of our population. We were indifferent instruments that he had to work with but he led

* Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. V, 14th August, 1947.

us with consummate skill, with unwavering determination, with an undying faith in our future, with faith in his weapon and above all, with faith in God. Let us prove true to that faith. Let us hope that India will not, in the hour of her triumph, give up or minimise the value of the weapon which served not only to rouse and inspire her in her moments of depression but has also proved its efficacy. India has a great part to play in the shaping and moulding of the future of a war-distracted world. She can play that part not by mimicking from a distance, what others are doing, or by joining in the race for armaments and competing with others in the discovery of the latest and most effective instruments of destruction. She has now the opportunity, and let us hope, she will have the courage and strength to place before the world for its acceptance her infallible substitute for war and bloodshed, death and destruction. The world needs it and will welcome it, unless it is prepared to reel back into barbarism from which it boasts to have emerged.

Let us then assure all countries of the world that we propose to stick to our historic tradition to be on terms of friendship and amity with all, that we have no designs against any one and hope that none will have any against us. We have only one ambition and desire, that is, to make our contribution to the building up of freedom for all and peace among mankind.

The country, which was made by God and Nature to be one, stands divided today. Separation from near and dear ones, even from strangers after some association, is always painful. I would be untrue to myself if I did not at this moment confess to a sense of sorrow at this separation. But I wish to send on your behalf and on my own our greetings and good wishes for the success and the best of luck in the high endeavour of government in which the people of Pakistan, which till today has been a part and parcel of ourselves, will be engaged. To

those who feel like us but are on the other side of the border we send a word of cheer. They should not give way to panic but should stick to their hearths and homes, their religion and culture and cultivate the qualities of courage and forbearance. They have no reason to fear that they will not get protection and just and fair treatment and they should not become victims of doubt and suspicion. They must accept the assurances publicly given and win their rightful place in the polity of the State, where they are placed, by their loyalty.

To all the minorities in India, we give the assurance that they will receive fair and just treatment and there will be no discrimination in any form against them. Their religion, their culture and their language are safe and they will enjoy all the rights and privileges of citizenship, and will be expected in their turn to render loyalty to the country in which they live and to its Constitution. To all, we give the assurance that it will be our endeavour to end poverty and squalor and its companions, hunger and disease; to abolish distinction and exploitation and to ensure decent conditions of living.

We are embarking on a great task. We hope that in this we shall have the unstinted service and co-operation of all our people and the sympathy and support of all the communities. We shall do our best to deserve it.

Call to the new-born Nation*

Let us, in this momentous hour of our history, when we are assuming power for the governance of our country, recall in grateful remembrance the services and sacrifices of all those who laboured and suffered for the achievement of the independence we are attaining today. Let us, on this historic occasion, pay our homage to the maker of our modern history. Mahatma Gandhi, who has inspired and guided us through all these years of trial and travail and who, in spite of the weight of years, is still working in his own way to complete what is left yet unaccomplished.

Let us gratefully acknowledge that while our achievement is in no small measure due to our own sufferings and sacrifices, it is also the result of world forces and events and last, though not the least, it is the consummation and fulfilment of the historic traditions and democratic ideals of the British race whose farsighted leaders and statesmen saw the vision and gave the pledges which are being redeemed today. We are happy to have in our midst, as a representative of that race, Viscount Mountbatten of Burma and his consort who have worked hard and played such an important part in bringing this about during the closing scenes of this drama. The period of domination by Britain over India ends today and our relationship with Britain is henceforward going to rest on a basis of equality, of mutual goodwill and mutual profit.

It is undoubtedly a day of rejoicing. But there is only one thought which mars and detracts from the fulness of this happy

* Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. V, 15th August, 1947.

event. India, which was made by God and Nature to be one, which culture and tradition and history of millenniums have made one, is divided today and many there are on the other side of the boundary who would much rather be on this side. To them, we send a word of cheer and assurance and ask them not to give way to panic or despair but to live with faith and courage in peace with their neighbours and fulfil the duties of loyal citizenship and thus win their rightful place. We send our greetings to the new Dominion which is being established today there and wish it the best luck in its great work of governing that region and making all its citizens happy and prosperous. We feel assured that they all will be treated fairly and justly without any distinction or discrimination. Let us hope and pray that the day will come when even those who have insisted upon and brought about this division will realise India's essential oneness and we shall be united once again. We must realise however that this can be brought about not by force but by large heartedness and co-operation and by so managing our affairs on this side as to attract those who have parted. It may appear to be a dream but it is no more fantastic a dream than that of those who wanted a division and may well be realised even sooner than we dare hope for today.

More than a day of rejoicing it is a day of dedication for all of us to build the India of our dreams. Let us turn our eyes away from the past and fix our gaze on the future. We have no quarrel with other nations and countries and let us hope, no one will pick a quarrel with us. By history and tradition, we are a peaceful people and India wants to be at peace with the world. India's Empire outside her own borders has been of a different kind from all other Empires. India's conquests have been the conquests of spirit which did not impose heavy chains of slavery, whether of iron or of gold, on others but tied other lands and other peoples to her with the more enduring ties of golden silk—of culture and civilisation, of religion and knowledge (*gyan*). We shall follow that same tradition and shall have no ambition save that of contributing our little mite to the building of peace and freedom in a war-distracted world by

holding aloft the banner under which we have marched to victory and placing in a practical manner in the hands of the world, the great weapon of Non-violence which has achieved this unique result. India has a great part to play. There is something in her life and culture which has enabled her to survive the onslaughts of time and today we witness a new birth full of promise, if only we prove ourselves true to our ideals.

Let us resolve to create conditions in this country when every individual will be free and provided with the wherewithal to develop and rise to his fullest stature, when poverty and squalor and ignorance and ill-health will have vanished, when the distinction between high and low, between rich and poor, will have disappeared, when religion will not only be professed and preached and practised freely but will have become a cementing force for binding man to man and not serve as a disturbing and disrupting force dividing and separating, when untouchability will have been forgotten like an unpleasant night dream, when exploitation of man by man will have ceased, when facilities and special arrangements will have been provided for the *adimjatis* of India and for all others who are backward, to enable them to catch up to others and when this land will have not only enough food to feed its teeming millions but will once again have become a land flowing with rivers of milk, when men and women will be laughing and working for all they are worth in fields and factories, when every cottage and hamlet will be humming with the sweet music of village handicrafts and maids will be busy with them and singing to their tune—when the sun and the moon will be shining on happy homes and loving faces.

To bring all this about, we need all the idealism and sacrifice, all the intelligence and diligence, all the determination and the power of organisation that we can muster. We have many parties and groups with differing ideals and ideologies. They are all trying to convert the country to their own ideologies and to mould the Constitution and the administration to suit their own view point. While they have the right to do so, the country and

the nation have the right to demand loyalty from them. All must realise that what is needed most today is a great constructive effort—not strife, hard solid work—not argumentation, and let us hope that all will be prepared to make their contribution. We want the peasant to grow more food, we want the workers to produce more goods, we want our industrialists to use their intelligence, tact and resourcefulness for the common good. To all we must assure conditions of decent and healthy life and opportunities for self-improvement and self-realisation.

Not only have the people to dedicate themselves to this great task that lies ahead but those who have so far been playing the role of rulers and regulators of the lives of our men and women have to assume the role of servants. Our army has won undying glory in distant lands for its bravery and great fighting qualities. Our soldiers, sailors and airmen have to realise that they now form a national army on whom devolves the duty not only of defending the freedom which we have won but also to help in a constructive way in building up a new life. There is no place in the armed forces of our country which is not open to our people, and what is more they are required to take the highest places as soon as they can so that they may take full charge of our defences. Our public servants in various departments of Government have to shed their role as rulers and have to become true servants of the people that their counterparts are in all free countries. The people and the Government on their side have to give them their trust and assure them conditions of service in keeping with the lives of the people in whose midst they have to live and serve.

We welcome the Indian States which have acceded to India and to their people we offer our hands of comradeship. To the princes and the rulers of the States we say that we have no designs against them. We trust they will follow the example of the King of England and become constitutional rulers. They would do well to take as their model the British monarchical system which has stood the shock of two successive world wars when so many other monarchies in Europe have toppled down.

To Indians settled abroad in British Colonies and elsewhere we send our good wishes and assurance of our abiding interest in their welfare. To our minorities, we give the assurance that they will receive fair and just treatment and their rights will be respected and protected.

One of the great tasks which we have in hand is to complete the Constitution under which not only will freedom and liberty be assured to each and all but which will enable us to achieve and attain and enjoy its fulfilment and its fruits. We must accomplish this task as soon as possible so that we may begin to live and work under a constitution of our own making, of which we may all be proud, and which it may become our pride and privilege to defend and to preserve to the lasting good of our people and for the service of mankind. In framing that Constitution we shall naturally draw upon the experience and knowledge of other countries and nations no less than on our own traditions and surroundings and may have at times to disregard the lines drawn by recent history and lay down new boundary lines not only of Provinces but also of distribution of powers and functions. Our ideal is to have a Constitution that will enable the people's will to be expressed and enforced and that will not only secure liberty to the individual but also reconcile and make that liberty subservient to the common good.

We have up to now been taking a pledge to achieve freedom and to undergo all sufferings and sacrifices for it. Time has come when we have to take a pledge of another kind. Let no one imagine that the time for work and sacrifice is gone and the time for enjoying the fruits thereof has come. Let us realise that the demand on our enthusiasm and capacity for unselfish work in the future will be as great as, if not greater than, what it has ever been before. We have, therefore, to dedicate ourselves once again to the great cause that beckons us. The task is great, the times are propitious. Let us pray that we may have the strength, the wisdom and the courage to fulfil it.

Unveiling Mahatma Gandhi's Portrait

Honourable Members, I am sure I am expressing the sense of gratefulness of all members of this House to Mr. Pattani for the present which he has made to this House. It was a happy inspiration of the late Sir Prabha Shankar Pattani to have preserved this beautiful portrait for so many years to be handed over to the nation on the auspicious occasion when India has got her freedom, and it is a happy moment for all of us that we have lived to see this portrait unveiled in this House on this occasion. It would be presumptuous on my part, particularly because I happen to be one of those fortunate many who have had the fortune and privilege to serve under Mahatma Gandhi for so many years, to say anything about the work which he has accomplished. He came to us at a time when the country was looking for something which would help it out of difficulty. We had experienced a great sense of frustration which comes after attempts made which have failed. The country had made many attempts to become free, it was looking for something that would give it the necessary impetus and, above all, the kind of weapon which will enable it to win its freedom. Mahatma Gandhi aroused that spirit and gave that weapon in the hands of the people, and although we may not have come up to his expectations, we have at least succeeded under his guidance and his inspiration in winning the freedom for which we have all been longing for so many years.

It is not only in the field of politics, but there is hardly any

* Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. V, 28 August, 1947.

field in the life of a human being which has not been in some way or other touched and brightened by Mahatma Gandhi. Whether we go to a village slum, to a city slum or whether we go to a big palace of a rich millionaire or a big Maharaja, there is hardly any place where his influence has not been felt, and felt very well indeed. That influence has permeated our life to an extent which probably we do not ourselves quite appreciate and fully realise, and the greatness of the Mahatma lies in this, that as time passes, as ages pass, the influence which he has exercised not only on our lives but on the current of world history will be more and more appreciated and more and more realised. Such men are not often or easily born. They come once in a way in the History of the World to turn its course, to change its current and here is Mahatma Gandhi whom it is our privilege and our good fortune to serve under today, who has turned the current of history of mankind and who has in his own life-time seen how the work which he has started has borne fruit and is bearing more and more precious fruit everyday. The miracles which he has wrought in our life are so many that it would be impossible for any one of us to recount them all in a short speech. We all know how he has made heroes out of clay, how he has moulded men of ordinary calibre into men of great capacity, of great culture and of great achievements. He has not only done that, he has created in the Nation as a whole, apart from mere individuals, a longing for freedom and also, in a way, by his work fulfilled that longing. So it is that we stand here today to pay homage to him. This picture which has been presented to us will be in this House reminding every member who sits on these benches, of the great part which he had played in our history and the World's history at a most critical and momentous time. It will remind members of the great duty which they owe to this country. It will remind all of us of the great heritage which he represents and which we all of us have got from our forefathers and above all, it will remind us how the freedom that we have won has to be utilized for the good of all. Let us hope that this picture will serve that purpose

and we shall prove worthy of the great Mahatma who had led us to this goal.

Discussion on Draft Constitution— Procedure for

Before, we go on to the next item on the agenda, I would like to explain to the House the procedure which I propose to follow in dealing with the Draft Constitution. Members are aware that the Draft Constitution was prepared by a Drafting Committee which was appointed by this House and the Draft was placed in the hands of Members nearly eight months or more ago. Members were asked to send in any suggestions or amendments which they wished to make and a large number of suggestions and amendments were received not only from Members but also from the public and public bodies, provincial governments and so forth. The Drafting Committee has considered all these suggestions and amendments and they have redrafted many of the articles in the light of the suggestions made by either Members or the public. So we have now got not only the Draft as it was originally prepared, but also the re-draft of a number of the articles which the Drafting Committee had prepared in the light of suggestions received. These have been placed in the hands of Members. What I propose now to do is to take up each Article after we, of course, have passed this motion for consideration and I shall take all these amendments of which notice has been given already as having been given in time, so that Members who have already given notice of amendments need not repeat the notice after the motion for consideration has been adopted. I will also give to Members two days more for giving notice of

*Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. VII, 4 November, 1948.

any further amendments which they wish to propose to the articles. And then, I propose not to accept any other amendments, unless they are of such a nature that it becomes necessary to accept them. Of course, there will be amendments which may be consequential and those will have to be accepted. There may also be amendments which for other reasons may be considered by the House to be of such a nature that they should be considered. I will not burke discussion of those amendments; I shall have them also. But ordinarily I would ask the Members to confine themselves to the amendments of which we have already got notice and they are, I believe, about a thousand in number. In this way, we might economise time without in any way affecting our efficiency and without in any way putting any check on free discussion of all the articles of the proposed draft. This is what I propose to do of course, subject to what the House lays down. I think this is quite reasonable in view of the fact that Members have had such a long time to consider and that they have considered in detail the draft is apparent from the fact that we have already got notice of about a thousand amendments, and if by any chance, any amendment has been overlooked and if any member feels its consideration to be necessary, we shall take it, but ordinarily I will not take any further amendments after this. What I propose is that we discuss the motion which Dr. Ambedkar will move for two days, that is, today, and tomorrow, when we sit both in the morning and in the afternoon and we give Saturday and Sunday for giving notice of amendments to the members. All the amendments of which we have already received notice and of which we shall have received notice by 5 O'clock on Sunday will be tabulated, printed and placed in the hands of Members by Monday, and then we proceed with the discussion of the amendments from Tuesday. That is the programme which I have outlined in my mind.

There is another thing which I might tell Members. There is a motion of which notice has been given and there is also an amendment of which notice has been given that this House

should adjourn discussion of the Constitution altogether and a new House on adult franchise and on non-communal lines should be elected and that House should deal with the question of framing the Constitution. I do not know if the House will be prepared to throw away all that we have been doing during the last two years, particularly because there is in the Draft an article which gives a somewhat easy method of amending the Constitution during the early years after it comes into force and if there is any lacuna or if there is anything which needs amendment, that could easily be done under the provision to which I have just made reference, and it is, therefore, not necessary that we should hold up the consideration of the entire Constitution until we have adult franchise. The difficulty will be in the first place to form the electorate under adult franchise; we have no such law existing at present. Adult franchise we have contemplated in this Draft Constitution and it will come into force when this Constitution has been passed. So if you want to have adult franchise and if you want to have another Constituent Assembly for the purpose of drafting the amendments, we shall have to pass another law and I do not know which House will have the right to pass that law which will constitute a Constituent Assembly. So I think it would be best to proceed with the draft which we have prepared after much labour and to which so much care and attention has been given by the Drafting Committee and by the Members of this House.

This is the programme which I propose to follow and if there is any other suggestion which any member wishes to make, I shall be glad to consider it. There is only one thing more which I might mention and that is this. I do not wish to curtail discussion. I want to give to members the fullest opportunity for considering every article and every aspect of the Constitutional question, because, after all, it is going to be our Constitution, but at the same time, I do not like that we should spend more time than is absolutely necessary over it by repeating arguments which have already been once advanced by one Member or another or by going over the same ground. For that reason, we may not reconsider many of the decisions which

have already been taken. Members know that we had long discussions, and after long discussions we settled the principles of the Constitution and the Draft, the bulk of it, is based upon those decisions which were taken after long discussion by this House. I would not expect that the Members would lightly throw away those decisions and insist upon a reconsideration of those decisions. There may be cases where a reconsideration may be necessary. But ordinarily, we shall proceed upon the decisions which have already once been taken and it is only where no decisions have yet been taken that the House may have to take decisions for the first time. Now there are certain questions on which no decisions have been taken. There were certain committees appointed by the House. The reports of those Committees were not considered. But the Drafting Committee has taken care to place in the draft alternative proposals, one set of proposals representing their own views where they differ from those of those Committees and another set of proposals embodying the recommendations and the decisions of those Committees. So when we come to those particular provisions, the House may consider them on their merits, and after considering them on their merits may accept either the opinion of the Drafting Committee or of the Committee of the House. The House will have the draft ready, so that it will not have to wait for preparing a draft on these questions. When we consider this whole matter from this point of view, I think, after all, the scope for discussion gets very much limited, because most of the amendments will be more or less of a drafting nature, because the decisions have already been taken, and so far as the drafting is concerned, the Drafting Committee has already considered many of these suggestions and amendments and it has accepted them. So, while there may be discussion of principle in regard to some questions which have not been decided, there is not much to discuss so far as principles are concerned, because we have already discussed those principles and we have arrived at certain conclusions. Therefore, what I feel is this, that if we proceeded in a business-like way, it should be possible for us to complete discussion of the whole Constitution by the second anniversary

of the day on which we started the work of this Constituent Assembly, that is, by the 9th of December next.

If we succeed in doing that, after that we might have a few days adjournment, when all the amendments which have been accepted by the House will be considered by the Drafting Committee and put in their proper places, when all the re-numbering and re-allocation of the articles from one Chapter to another and so forth—all that becomes necessary—all that could be done within that interval of say ten or fifteen days. Then, we might meet a second time when we could finally accept the Constitution as it will have emerged. In this second discussion, under the Rules, we shall not go into the merits of any question; we shall have only to see that the amendments as they were accepted by the House have been incorporated in the final form in which the draft is placed before the House.

This is the proposal which I place before the House and I think this ought to meet with the approval of the members of this House.

Constituent Assembly vis-a-vis Constitution*

I desire to congratulate the Assembly on accomplishing a task of such tremendous magnitude. It is not my purpose to appraise the value of the work that the Assembly has done or the merits or demerits of the Constitution which it has framed. I am content to leave that to others and to posterity. I shall attempt only to point out some of its salient features and the method which we have pursued in framing the Constitution.

Before I do that, I would like to mention some facts which will show the tremendousness of the task which we undertook some three years ago. If you consider the population with which the Assembly has had to deal, you will find that it is more than the population of the whole of Europe minus Russia, being 319 millions as against 317 millions. The countries of Europe have never been able to join together or coalesce even in a Confederacy, much less under one unitary Government. Here, in spite of the size of the population and the country, we have succeeded in framing a Constitution which covers the whole of it. Apart from the size, there were other difficulties which were inherent in the problem itself. We have got many communities living in this country. We have got many languages prevalent in different parts of it. We have got other kinds of differences dividing the people in the different parts from one another. We had to make provision not only for areas which are advanced educationally and economically; we had also to make provision for backward people like the tribes and for backward areas like

*Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. XI, 26 November, 1949.

the tribal Areas. The communal problem had been one of the knottiest problems which the country has had before it for a pretty long time. The Second Round Table Conference which was attended by Mahatma Gandhi failed because the communal problem could not be solved. The subsequent history of the country is too recent to require narration here; but we know this that as a result, the country has had to be divided and we have lost two big portions in the north-east and north-west.

Another problem of great magnitude was the problem of the Indian States. When the British came to India, they did not conquer the country as a whole or at one stroke. They got bits of it from time to time. The bits which came into their direct possession and control came to be known as British India; but a considerable portion remained under the rule and control of the Indian Princes. The British thought at the time that it was not necessary or profitable for them to take direct control of those territories, and they allowed the old Rulers to continue subject to their suzerainty. But they entered into various kinds of treaties and engagements with them. We had something near six hundred States covering more than one-third of the territory of India and one-fourth of the population of the country. They varied in size from small tiny principalities to big States like Mysore, Hyderabad, Kashmir, etc. When the British decided to leave this country, they transferred power to us; but at the same time, they also declared that all the treaties and engagements they had with the Princes had lapsed. The paramountcy which they had so long exercised and by which they could keep the princes in order also lapsed. The Indian government was then faced with the problem of tackling these States which had different traditions of rule, some of them having some form of popular representation in Assemblies and some

having no semblance of anything like that, and governing completely autocratically.

As a result of the declaration that the treaties with the Princes and Paramountcy had lapsed, it became open to any Prince or any combination of Princes to assume independence and even to enter into negotiations with any foreign power and thus become islands of independent territory within the country. They were undoubtedly geographical and other compulsions which made it physically impossible for most of them to go against the Government of India but constitutionally it had become possible. The Constituent Assembly therefore had at the very beginning of its labours, to enter into negotiations with them to bring their representatives into the Assembly so that a constitution might be framed in consultation with them. The first efforts were successful and some of them did join this Assembly at an early stage but others hesitated. It is not necessary to pry into the secrets of what was happening in those days behind the scenes. It will be sufficient to state that by August 1947 when the Indian Independence Act came into force, almost all of them with two notable exceptions, Kashmir in the north and Hyderabad in the south, had acceded to India. Kashmir soon after followed the example of others and acceded. There were standstill agreements with all of them including Hyderabad which continued the *status quo*. As time passed, it became apparent that it was not possible at any rate for the smaller States to maintain their separate independent existence and then a process of integration with India started. In course of time not only have all the smaller States coalesced and become integrated with some province or other of India but some of the larger ones also have joined. Many of the States have formed Unions of their own and such Unions have become part of the Indian Union. It must be said to the credit of the Princes and the people of the States no less than to the credit of the States Ministry under the wise and far-sighted guidance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel that by the time we have been able to pass this Constitution, the states are now more or less in the same position as the Provinces and it has become possible to

describe all of them including the Indian States and the Provinces as States in the Constitution. The announcement which has been made just now by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel makes the position very clear, and now there is no difference between the States, as understood before, and the provinces in the New Constitution.

It has undoubtedly taken us three years to complete this work, but when we consider the work that has been accomplished and the number of days that we have spent in framing this Constitution, the details of which were given by the Honourable Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, yesterday, we have no reason to be sorry for the time spent.

It has enabled the apparently intractable problem of the States and the communal problem to be solved. What had proved insoluble at the Round Table Conference and had resulted in the division of the country has been solved with the consent of all parties concerned, and again under the wise guidance of the Honourable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

At first we were able to get rid of separate electorates which had poisoned our political life for so many years, but reservation of seats for the communities which enjoyed separate electorates before had to be conceded, although on the basis of their population and not as had been done in the Act of 1919 and the Act of 1935 of giving additional representation on account of the so-called historical and other superiority claimed by some of the communities. It has become possible only because the Constitution was not passed earlier that even reservation of seats has been given up by the communities concerned and so our Constitution does not provide for reservation of seats on communal basis, but for reservation only in favour of two classes of people in our population, namely, the depressed classes who are Hindus and the tribal people, on account of their backwardness in education and in other respects. I therefore see no reason to be apologetic about the delay.

The cost too which the Assembly has had to incur during its three years' existence is not too high when you take into consideration the factors going to constitute it. I understand that the expenses up to the 22nd of November come to Rs. 63,96,729/-

The method which the Constituent Assembly adopted in connection with the Constitution was first to lay down its' terms of reference as it were in the form of an objective Resolution which was moved by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in an inspiring speech and which constitutes now the Preamble to our Constitution. It then proceeded to appoint a number of committees to deal with different aspects of the Constitutional problem. Dr. Ambedkar mentioned the names of these Committees. Several of these had as their Chairman either Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru or Sardar Patel to whom thus goes the credit for the fundamentals of our Constitution. I have only to add that they all worked in a business-like manner and produced reports which were considered by the Assembly and their recommendations were adopted as the basis on which the draft of the Constitution had to be prepared. This was done by Mr. B. N. Rau. who brought to bear on his task a detailed knowledge of Constitutions of other countries and an extensive knowledge of the conditions of this country as well as his own administrative experience. The Assembly then appointed the Drafting Committee which worked on the original draft prepared by Mr. B.N. Rau and produced the Draft Constitution which was considered by the Assembly at great length at the second reading stage. As Dr. Ambedkar pointed out, there were not less than 7,635 amendments of which 2,473 amendments were moved. I am mentioning this only to show that it was not only the Members of the Drafting Committee who were giving their close attention to the Constitution, but other Members were vigilant and scrutinising the Draft in all its details. No wonder, that we had to consider not only each article in the Draft, but practically every sentence and sometimes, every word in every article. It may interest honourable Members to know that the public were taking great interest in its proceedings and I have discovered that no less than 53,000 visitors were admitted to

the Visitors' gallery during the period when the Constitution has been under consideration. In the result, the Draft Constitution has increased in size, and by the time it has been passed, it has come to have 395 articles and 8 schedules, instead of the 243 articles and 13 schedules of the original Draft of Mr. B. N. Rau. I do not attach much importance to the complaint which is sometimes made that it has become too bulky. If the provisions have been well thought out, the bulk need not disturb the equanimity of our mind.

We have now to consider the salient features of the Constitution. The first question which arises and which has been mooted is as to the category to which this Constitution belongs. Personally, I do not attach any importance to the label which may be attached to it—whether you call it Federal Constitution or Unitary Constitution or by any other name. It makes no difference so long as the Constitution serves our purpose. We are not bound to have a Constitution which completely and fully falls in line with known categories of Constitutions in the world. We have to take certain facts of history in our own country and the Constitution has, not to an inconsiderable extent, been influenced by such realities as facts of history.

You are all aware that until the Round Table Conference of 1930, India was completely a Unitary Government and the provinces derived what ever power they possessed from the Government of India. It was there for the first time that the question of Federation in a practical form arose which would include not only the Provinces but also the many States that were in existence. The Constitution of 1935 provided for a Federation in which both the provinces of India and the states were asked to join. But the federal part of it could not be brought into operation, because terms on which the Princes could agree to join it could not be settled in spite of prolonged negotiation. And, when the war broke out, that part of the Constitution had practically to be abrogated.

In the present Constitution it has been possible not only to bring in practically all the States which fell within our

geographical limits, but to integrate the largest majority of them in India, and the Constitution as it stands practically makes no difference so far as the administration and the distribution of powers among the various organs of the State are concerned between what were the Provinces and what were Indian States before. They are all now more or less on the same footing and, as time passes, whatever little distinction still exists is bound to disappear. Therefore so far as labelling is concerned, we need not be troubled by it.

Well, the first and the most obvious fact which will attract any observer is the fact that we are going to have a Republic. India knew republics in the past olden days, but that was 2,000 years ago or more and those Republics were small Republics. We never had anything like the Republic which we are going to have now, although there were empires in those days as well as during the Mughal period which covered very large parts of the country. The President of the Republic will be an elected President. We never have had an elected Head of the State which covered such a large area of India. And it is for the first time that it becomes open to the humblest and the lowliest citizens of the country to deserve and become the President or the Head of this big State which counts among the biggest States of the world today. This is not a small matter. But because we have an elected President, some of the problems which are of a very difficult nature have arisen. We have provided for the election of the President. We have provided for an elected legislature which is going to have supreme authority. In America, the legislature and the President are both elected and there both have more or less equal powers each in its or his own sphere, the President in the executive sphere and the legislature in the legislative sphere.

We considered whether we should adopt the American model or the British model where we have a hereditary king who is the fountain of all honour and power, but who does not actually enjoy any power. All the power rests in the Legislature to which the Ministers are responsible. We have had to reconsider the

position of an elected President with an elected Legislature and in doing so we have adopted more or less the position of the British Monarch for the President. This may or may not be satisfactory. Some people think too much power has been given to the President; others think that the President being an elected President, should have even more powers than are given to him.

If you look at it from the point of view of the electorate which elects the Parliament and which elects the President, you will find that practically the entire adult population of the country joins in electing this Parliament and it is not only the Members of this Parliament of India but also the Members of the Legislative Assemblies of the States who join in electing the President. It thus comes about that, while the Parliament and Legislative Assemblies are elected by the adult population of the country as a whole, the President is elected by representatives who represent the entire population twice over, once as representatives of the States and again as their representatives in the Central Parliament of the country. But although the President is elected by the same electorate as the Central and State Legislatures, it is as well that his position is that of a Constitutional President.

Then we come to the Ministers. They are of course responsible to the Legislature and tender advice to the President who is bound to act according to that advice. Although there are no specific provisions, so far as I know, in the Constitution itself making it binding on the President to accept the advice of the Ministers, it is hoped that the convention under which in England the King acts always on the advice of his Ministers will be established in this country also and the President, not so much on account of the written word in the Constitution, but as the result of this very healthy convention, will become a Constitutional President in all matters.

The Central Legislature consists of two Houses known as the House of People and the Council of States which both together constitute the Parliament of India. In the Provinces, or States as

they are now called, we shall have a Legislative Assembly in all of them except those which are mentioned in Parts C and D of Schedule I, but every one of them will not have a Second Chamber. Some of the provinces, whose representatives felt that a Second Chamber is required for them, have been provided with a Second Chamber. But there is a provision in the Constitution that if a province does not want such a Second Chamber to continue or if a province which has not got one wants to establish one, the wish has to be expressed through the Legislature by a majority of two-thirds of the Members voting and by a majority of the total number of Members in the Legislative Assembly. So, even while providing some of the States with Second Chambers, we have provided also for their easy removal or for their easy establishment by making this kind of amendment of the Constitution not a Constitutional Amendment, but a matter of ordinary parliamentary legislation.

We have provided for adult suffrage by which the legislative assemblies in the provinces and the House of the People in the Centre will be elected. It is a very big step that we have taken. It is big not only because our present electorate is a very much smaller electorate and based very largely on property qualification, but it is also big because it involves tremendous numbers. Our population now is something like 320 millions if not more and we have found from experience gained during the enrolment of voters that has been going on in the provinces that 50 per cent, roughly represent the adult population. And on that basis we shall have not less than 160 million voters on our rolls. The work of organising election by such vast numbers is of tremendous magnitude and there is no other country where election on such a large scale has ever yet been held.

I will just mention to you some facts in this connection. This legislative assemblies in the provinces, it is roughly calculated, will have more than 3,800 members who will have to be elected in as many constituencies or perhaps a few less. Then there will be something like 500 members for the House of the People and about 220 Members for the Council of States. We shall thus have to provide for the election of more than 4,500

members and the country will have to be divided into something like 4,000 constituencies or so. I was the other day, as a matter of amusement, calculating what our electoral roll will look like. If you print 40 names on a page of foolscap size, we shall require something like 20 lakhs of sheets of foolscap size to print all the names of the voters, and if you combine the whole thing in one volume, the thickness of the volume will be something like 200 yards. That alone gives us some idea of the vastness of the task and the work involved in finalising the rolls, delimiting Constituencies, fixing polling stations and making other arrangements which will have to be done between now and the winter of 1950-51 when it is hoped the elections may be held.

Some people have doubted the wisdom of adult franchise. Personally, although I look upon it as an experiment the result of which no one will be able to forecast today, I am not dismayed by it. I am a man of the village and although I have had to live in cities for a pretty long time, on account of my work, my roots are still there. I, therefore know the village people who will constitute the bulk of this vast electorate. In my opinion, our people possess intelligence and commonsense. They also have a culture which the sophisticated people of today may not appreciate, but which is solid. They are not literate and do not possess the mechanical skill of reading and writing. But, I have no doubt in my mind that they are able to take measure of their own interest and also of the interests of the country at large if things are explained to them. In fact, in some respects, I consider them to be even more intelligent than many a worker in a factory, who loses his individuality and becomes more or less a part of the machine which he has to work. I have, therefore no doubt in my mind that if things are explained to them, they will not only be able to pick up the technique of election, but will be able to cast their vote in an intelligent manner and I have, therefore, no misgivings about the future on their account. I cannot say the same thing about the other people who may try to influence them by slogans and by placing before them beautiful pictures of impracticable programmes. Nevertheless, I think their sturdy commonsense

will enable them to see things in the right perspective. We can, therefore, reasonably hope that we shall have legislatures composed of members who shall have their feet on the ground and who will take a realistic view of things.

Although provision has been made for a second chamber in the Parliament and for second chambers in some of the States, it is the popular House which is supreme. In all financial and money matters, the supremacy of the popular House is laid down in so many words. But even in regard to other matters where the Upper Chamber may be said to have equal powers for initiating and passing laws, the supremacy of the popular House is assured. So far as Parliament is concerned, if a difference arises between the two Chambers, a joint session may be held; but the Constitution provides that the number of Members of the Council of States shall not be more than 50 per cent, of the Members of the House of the People. Therefore, even in the case of a joint session, the supremacy of the House of the People is maintained, unless the majority in that very House is a small one which will be just a case in which its supremacy should not prevail. In the case of provisionial legislatures, the decision of the Lower House prevails if it is taken a second time. The Upper Chamber therefore can only delay the passage of Bills for a time, but cannot prevent it. The President or the Governor, as the case may be, will have to give his assent to any legislation, but that will be only on the advice of his Ministry which is responsible ultimately to the popular House. Thus, it is the will of the people as expressed by their representatives in the popular Chamber that will finally determine all matters. The second Chamber and the President or the Governor can only direct reconsideration and can only cause some delay: but if the popular Chamber is determined, it will have its way under the Constitution. The Government therefore of the country as a whole, both in the Centre and in the Provinces, will rest on the will of the people which will be expressed from day to day through their representatives in the legislatures and, occasionally directly by them at the time of the general elections.

We have provided in the Constitution for a judiciary which will be independent. It is difficult to suggest anything more to make the Supreme Court and the High Courts independent of the influence of the Executive. There is an attempt made in the Constitution to make even the lower judiciary independent of any outside or extraneous influence. One of our articles makes it easy for the State Governments to introduce separation of Executive from Judicial functions and placing the magistracy which deals with criminal cases on similar footing as Civil Courts. I can only express the hope that this long overdue reform will soon be introduced in the States.

Our Constitution has devised certain independent agencies to deal with particular matters. Thus it has provided for Public Service Commissions both for the Union and for the States and placed such Commission on an independent footing so that they may discharge their duties without being influenced by the Executive. One of the things against which we have to guard is that there should be no room as far as it is humanly possible for jobbery, nepotism and favouritism. I think the provisions which we have introduced into our Constitution will be very helpful in this direction.

Another independent authority is the Comptroller and Auditor-General who will watch our finances and see to it that no part of the revenues of India or of any of the States is used for purposes and on items without due authority and whose duty it will be otherwise to keep our accounts in order. When we consider that our Governments will have to deal with hundreds of crores, it becomes clear how important and vital this Department will be. We have provided another important authority *i.e.*, the Election Commissioner whose function it will be to conduct and supervise the elections to the Legislatures and to take all other necessary action in connection with them. One of the dangers which we have to face arises out of any corruption which parties, candidates or the Government in power may practise. We have had no experience of democratic elections for a long time except during the last few years and now that we have got real power, the danger of corruption is

not only imaginary. It is therefore as well that our Constitution guards against this danger and makes provision for an honest and straightforward election by the voters. In the case of the Legislature, the High Courts, the Public Services Commission, the comptroller and Auditor-General and the Election Commissioner, the Staff which will assist them in their work has also been placed under their control and in most of these cases their appointment, promotion and discipline vest in the particular institution to which they belong thus giving additional safeguards about their independence.

The Constitution has given in two Schedules, namely Schedules V and VI, special provisions for the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes. In the case of the Tribes and Tribal Areas in States other than Assam, the Tribes will be able to influence the administration through the Tribes Advisory Council. In the case of the Tribes and Tribal Areas in Assam, they are given larger powers through their District Councils and Autonomous Regional Councils. There is, further provision for a Minister in the State Ministries to be in charge of the welfare of the Tribes and the Scheduled Castes and a Commission will also report about the way in which the areas are administered. It was necessary to make this provision on account of the backwardness of the Tribes which require protection and also because their own way of solving their own problems and carrying on their Tribal life. These provisions have given them considerable satisfaction as the provision for the welfare and protection of the Scheduled Castes has given satisfaction to them.

The Constitution has gone into great details regarding the distribution of power and functions between the Union and the States in all aspects of their administrative and other activities. It has been said by some that the powers given to the Centre are too many and too extensive and the State have been deprived of power which should really belong to them in their own fields. I do not wish to pass any judgement on this criticism and can only say that we cannot be too cautious about our

future, particularly when we remember the history of this country extending over many centuries. But such powers as have been given to the Centre to act within the sphere of the States relate only to emergencies, whether political or financial and economic, and I do not anticipate that there will be any tendency on the part of the Centre to grab more power than is necessary for good administration of the country as a whole. In any case the Central Legislature consists of representatives from the States and unless they are convinced of their overriding necessity, they are not likely to consent to the use of any such powers by the Central executive as against the States whose people they represent. I do not attach much importance to the complaint that residuary powers have been vested in the Union. Powers have been very meticulously and elaborately defined and demarcated in the three lists of Schedule VII, and the residue whatever it may be, is not likely to cover any large field, and, therefore, the vesting of such residuary powers does not mean any very serious derogation in fact from the power which ought to belong to the States.

One of the problems which the Constituent Assembly took considerable time in solving relates to the language for official purposes of the country. There is a natural desire that we should have our own language, and in spite of the difficulties on account of the multiplicity of languages prevalent in the country, we have been able to adopt Hindi, which is the language that is understood by the largest number of people in the country as our official language. I look upon this as a decision of very great importance when we consider that in a small country like Switzerland they have no less than three official languages and in South Africa two official languages. It shows a spirit of accommodation and a determination to organize the country as one nation that those whose language is not Hindi have voluntarily accepted it as the official language. There is no question of imposition now, English, during the period of British Rule and Persian, during the period of the Muslim Empire were Court and official languages. Although people have studied them and have acquired proficiency in them, nobody can claim

that they were voluntarily adopted by the people of the country at large. Now for the first time in our history we have accepted one language which will be the language to be used all over the country for all official purposes, and let me hope that it will develop into a national language in which all will feel equal pride while each area will be not only free, but also encouraged to develop its own peculiar language in which its culture and its traditions are enshrined. The use of English during the period of transition was considered inevitable for practical reasons and no one need be despondent over this decision, which has been dictated purely by practical considerations. It is the duty of the country as a whole now and especially of those whose language is Hindi, to so shape and develop it as to make it the language in which the composite culture of India can find its expression adequately and nobly.

Another important feature of our Constitution is that it enables amendments to be made without much difficulty. Even the constitutional amendments are not as difficult as in the case of some other countries, but many of the provisions in the Constitution are capable of being amended by the Parliament by ordinary acts and do not require the procedure laid down for constitutional amendments to be followed. There was a provision at one time which proposed that amendments should be made easy for the first five years after the Constitution comes into force, but such a provision has become unnecessary on account of the numerous exceptions which have been made in the Constitution itself for amendments without the procedure laid down for constitutional amendments. On the whole, therefore, we have been able to draft a Constitution which I trust will serve the country well.

There is a special provision in our Directive Principles to which I attach great importance. We have not provided for the good of our people only but have laid down in our directive principles that our State shall endeavour to promote material peace and security, maintain just and honourable relations between nations, foster respect for international law and treaty obligations and encourage settlement of international disputes

by arbitration. In a world torn with conflicts, in a world which even after the devastation of two world wars is still depending on armaments to establish peace and goodwill, we are destined to play a great part if we prove true to the teachings of the Father of the Nation and give effect to this directive principle in our Constitution. We pray to God that He would give us the wisdom and the strength to pursue this path in spite of the difficulties which beset us and the atmosphere which may well choke us. Let us have faith in ourselves and in the teachings of the Master whose portrait hangs over my head and we shall fulfil the hopes and prove true to the best interests of not only our country but of the world at large.

I do not propose to deal with the criticism which relate mostly to the articles in the part dealing with Fundamental Rights by which absolute rights are curtailed and the articles dealing with Emergency Powers. Other Members have dealt with these objections at great length. All that I need state at this stage is that the present conditions of the country and tendencies which are apparent have necessitated these provisions which are also based on the experience of other countries which have had to enforce them through judicial decisions, even when they were not provided for in the Constitution.

There are only two regrets which I must share with the honourable Members I would have liked to have some qualifications laid down for members of the Legislatures. It is anomalous that we should insist upon high qualifications for those who administer or help in administering the law but none for those who make it except that they are elected. A law giver requires intellectual equipment but even more than that capacity to take a balanced view of things, to act independently and above all to be true to those fundamental things of life—in one word—to have character. It is not possible to devise any yardstick for measuring the moral qualities of a man and so long as that is not possible, our Constitution will remain defective. The other regret is that we have not been able to draw up our first Constitution of a free Bharat in an Indian language. The difficulties in both cases were practical and proved

insurmountable. But that does not make the regret any the less poignant.

We have prepared a democratic Constitution. But successful working of democratic institutions requires in those who have to work them willingness to respect the view points of others capacity for compromise and accommodation. Many things which cannot be written in a Constitution are done by conventions. Let me hope that we shall show those capacities and develop those conventions. The way in which we have been able to draw this Constitution without taking recourse to voting and to divisions in lobbies strengthens that hope.

Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend upon the way in which the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it. It is a trite saying that a country can have only the Government it deserves. Our Constitution has provisions in it which appear to some to be objectionable from one point or another. We must admit that the defects are inherent in the situation in the country and the people at large. If the people who are elected are capable and men of character and integrity they would be able to make the best even of a defective Constitution. If they are lacking in these the Constitution cannot help the country. After all, a Constitution like a machine is a lifeless thing. It acquires life because of the men who control it and operate it, and India needs today nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them. There is a tisserous tendency arising out of various elements in our life. We have communal differences, caste differences, language differences, provincial differences and so forth. It requires men of strong character men of vision, men who will not sacrifice the interests of the country at large for the sake of smaller groups and areas and who will rise over the prejudices which are born of these differences. We can only hope that the country will throw up such men in abundance. I can say this from the experience of the struggle that we have had during the period of the freedom movement that new

occasions throw up new men; not once but almost on every occasion when all leading men in the Congress were clapped into prison suddenly without having the time to leave instructions to others and even to make plans for carrying on their campaigns, people arose from amongst the masses who were able to continue and conduct the campaigns with intelligence, with initiative, with capacity for organisation which nobody suspected they possessed. I have no doubt that when the country needs men of character, they will be coming up and the masses will throw them up. Let, not those who have served in the past therefore rest on their oars, saying that they have done their part and now has come the time for them to enjoy the fruits of their labours. No such time comes to anyone who is really earnest about his work. In India today I feel that the work that confronts us is even more difficult than the work which we had when we were engaged in the struggle. We did not have then any conflicting claims to reconcile, no loaves and fishes to distribute, no powers to share. We have all these now, and the temptations are really great. Would to God that we shall have the wisdom and the strength to rise above them, and to serve the country which we have succeeded in liberating.

Mahatma Gandhi laid stress on the purity of the methods which had to be pursued for attaining our ends. Let us not forget that this teaching has eternal value and was not intended only for the period of stress and struggle but has as much authority and value today as it ever had before. We have a tendency to blame others for everything that goes wrong and not to introspect and try to see if we have any share in it or not. It is very much easier to scan one's own actions and motives if one is inclined to do so than to appraise correctly the actions and motives of others. I shall only hope that all those whose good fortune it may be to work this Constitution in future will remember that it was a unique victory which we achieved by the unique method taught to us by the Father of the Nation, and it is up to us to preserve and protect the independence that we have won and to make it really bear fruit for the man in the

street. Let us launch on this new enterprise of running our Independent Republic with confidence, with truth and non-violence and above all with heart within and God over head.

Before I close, I must express my thanks to all the Members of this august Assembly from whom I have received not only courtesy but, if I may say so, also their respect and affection. Sitting in the Chair and watching the proceedings from day to day, I have realised as nobody else could have, with what zeal and devotion the members of the Drafting Committee and especially its Chairman, Dr. Ambedkar in spite of his indifferent health, have worked. We could never make a decision which was or could be ever so right as when we put him on the Drafting Committee and made him its Chairman. He has not only justified his selection but has added lustre to the work which he has done. In this connection, it would be invidious to make any distinction as among the other members of the Committee. I know they have all worked with the same zeal and devotion as its Chairman, and they deserve the thanks of the country.

I must convey, if you will permit me, my own thanks as well as the thanks of the House to our Constitutional Adviser, Shri B.N. Rau, who worked honorarily all the time that he was here, assisting the Assembly not only with his knowledge and erudition but also enabled the other Members to perform their duties with thoroughness and intelligence by supplying them with the material on which they could work. In this he was assisted by his band of research workers and other members of the staff who worked with zeal and devotion. Tribute has been paid justly to Shri S.N. Mukerjee who has proved of such invaluable help to the Drafting Committee.

On Election as Provisional President*

I recognize the solemnity of this occasion. We have after a long struggle reached one stage, and now another stage begins. It has been your kindness to place on me a very heavy responsibility. I have always held that the time for congratulation is not when a man is appointed to an office, but when he retires, and I would like to wait until the moment comes when I have to lay down the office which you have conferred on me to see whether I have deserved the confidence and the goodwill which have been showered on me from all sides and by all friends alike. When I sit listening to laudatory speeches—and although I have tried to cut that down to some extent, here also I have had to submit to it to a certain extent,—I am reminded of a story in the Maha Bharat, which is so full of piquant situations, and the solution that was found by Shree Krishna, who solved all those difficult and apparently insoluble problems which arose was this. One of those days, Arjun took a vow that he would perform a certain thing before the sun set on that day and that if he did not succeed, he would burn himself on a pyre. He unfortunately, did not succeed. And then the problem arose as to what was to be done. In fulfilment of that vow, he would have to burn himself. This, of course, was unthinkable so far as the Pandavas were concerned. But Arjuna was adamant in his resolve. Shri Krishna solved this problem by saying, “if you sit and praise yourself or listen to praise by others, that would be equivalent to committing suicide and

*Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. XII, 24 January, 1950.

burning yourself; so you had better submit to that and your vow will be fulfilled." Very often I have listened to such speeches in that spirit. Because, I have felt that there are many things which I am not able to fulfil, which I am not able to accomplish, and the only way in which I can fulfil these things is to commit that kind of suicide. But, here, I am in a somewhat different situation. When our Prime Minister and our Deputy Prime Minister speak with emotion about me, I cannot but reciprocate that kind of emotion. We have lived and worked together for more than quarter of a century and in the closest association we have fought. We have never faltered; we have jointly succeeded also. And now that I am placed in one chair and they are occupying other chairs side by side, and there are other friends whose association I value equally well, who will be sitting by their side to help and assist me and when I know that I have the goodwill of all the members of this House and of a very large circle of friends outside this House. I feel confident that the duties which have been imposed upon me will be discharged to their satisfaction; not because I can do that, but because the joint efforts of all will enable the duties to be so performed.

The country today is facing very many problems and my feeling is that the kind of work which we have now to do is different from that which we used to do two years ago. It requires greater devotion, greater care, greater application and greater sacrifice. I can only hope that the country will throw up men and women who will be able to take up the burden and fulfil the highest aspirations of our people. May God give us strength to do that.

First Address to Members of Parliament*

Members of Parliament, I welcome you here today as Members of the first Parliament of the Republic of India, elected under our Constitution. We have now given full effect to the provisions of the Constitution, relating to the composition of the Legislatures and the Headship of the State, and thus completed one stage of our journey. Even as we complete that stage, we start on another. There is no resting place for a nation or a people on their onward march. You, Members of Parliament, newly elected by over 170 millions of our people, are the pilgrims who have to march forward in their company. On you rests a unique privilege and a heavy responsibility.

As I speak to you on this historic occasion, I have a feeling of the high destiny of our ancient land and the vast numbers of men and women who live in it. Destiny beckons to us and it is for us to respond to its call. That call is for the service of this great land of India, which has passed through good fortune and ill-fortune alike since its story began, many thousands of years ago, at the dawn of history. During these many years, greatness has come to our land and tragedy has also been our fate. Now that we stand on the threshold of another phase of India's long story, we have to determine afresh how best to serve her. You and I have taken the oath of service to this country of ours. May we be true to that pledge and dedicate our highest endeavour to its fulfilment.

*Parliamentary Debates (LS) Vol. I, 16 May, 1952.

India has, after a long period of subjection, gained her freedom and independence. That freedom has to be maintained, defended and enlarged at all cost, for it is on the basis of that freedom alone that any structure of progress can be built. But freedom by itself is not enough—it must also bring a measure of happiness to our people and a lessening of the burdens they suffer from. It has, therefore, become of vital importance for us to labour for the rapid economic advancement of our people and to endeavour to realise the noble ideals of equality and social and economic justice which have been laid down in our Constitution.

India has represented throughout her history certain other urges of the human spirit. That has, perhaps, been the distinguishing mark of India, and even in recent years we saw a noble example of that ancient spirit and urge of India in the form of Mahatma Gandhi, who led us to freedom. To him, political freedom was a vital step, but only a step to the larger freedom of the human spirit. He taught us the way of peace and non-violence, but not the peace of the grave or the non-violence of the timid. And he taught us, in line with the teachings of India's ancient sages and great men, that it is not through hatred and violence that great ends are achieved, that right ends must be pursued and achieved only through right methods. That is a basic lesson not only for us of India but, if I may venture to say so, for people throughout the world.

I earnestly trust that, in the great tasks that face us, you will remember this ancient and ever-new message of India and will work in a spirit of co-operative endeavour, placing the cause of the nation and of humanity above all lesser objectives. We have to build up the unity of India, the unity of a free people working for the realisation of the high destiny that awaits them. We have, therefore, to put an end to all tendencies that weaken that unity and raise barriers between us, the barriers of communalism, provincialism and casteism. Opinions will and must differ in regard to many political and economic matters, but if the good of India and her people is our dominant urge and we realise, as we must, that this good can only be

achieved through the methods of peaceful co-operation and democratic processes, then these differences can only add to the richness of our public life.

It is with this outlook that I beg of you to face your problems here in this country and to face the world with friendly eyes and without fear. Fear today, fear of some approaching disaster, darkens the world. It is not through fear that the individual or the nation grows, but through fearlessness, *abhaya*, as our ancient books told us.

We have consistently pursued a policy of friendship with all the countries of the world and that policy, though sometimes misunderstood, has been progressively appreciated by others and is yielding fruit. I trust that we shall firmly continue that policy and thus try to lessen somewhat the tension that exists in many parts of the world. My Government has not sought to interfere with other countries just as it does not invite any interference from others in our own country. We have tried the method of co-operation wherever possible and our good offices are always available to further the cause of peace. We have no desire to thrust them on anyone. We realise, however, that in the world today no country can remain isolated, that it is inevitable that international co-operation should grow till, at some distant date, all the nations of the world join together in a great co-operative endeavour for the advancement of humanity.

For nearly a year now, efforts have been made in Korea to find some way to a truce which might lead to a peaceful settlement of the many problems that afflict the far-east of Asia. I have expressed the hope on several occasions that success will crown these efforts and peace be established again. It is the greatest of tragedies that, despite assertions of goodwill for the Korean people, this ancient country has been reduced by war, hunger and pestilence to utter ruin. It has become a signal and a warning to the world of what war means, whatever immediate justification might be advanced for it. War does not solve problems, it creates them. In Korea now it appears that most of the obstacles to a truce have been overcome and only one major hurdle, the exchange of prisoners, remains. It should

not be beyond the wit of statesmen to overcome this last obstacle. Not to do so will be to confess the failure not only of wisdom but of common humanity. The world hungers for peace and the statesmen who bring peace will remove a heavy and fearful burden that now oppresses the minds of hundreds of millions of people throughout the world.

I have referred on previous occasions to the great nationalist upsurge in various parts of Asia and Africa which are still denied freedom. In particular, I have made reference to recent events in Tunisia and expressed our sympathy for the people of that land in their desire for freedom. I regret greatly that, in spite of the desire of a large number of countries in Asia and Africa, even a discussion of this subject was not allowed in the United Nations. The United Nations Organisation was meant to represent the world community, inclusive of all, and its primary aim was the preservation of peace. Gradually, the noble aims of the founders of the United Nations and the Charter that they framed appear to be getting blurred. The wide vision gives place to a more limited outlook. The conception of universality changes into something far narrower and the urge to peace weakens. The United Nations Organization came into existence to fulfil a deeply felt want of humanity. If it fails to fulfil that want and becomes an ineffective organ for the maintenance of peace and the advancement of freedom, that, indeed will be tragedy. I earnestly trust that this great organisation, on which the hopes of the world have been built up, will return to its old moorings and become, as it was meant to be, a pillar of peace and freedom.

My Government has sent a Cultural Delegation to our great neighbour, China. That Delegation has carried the greeting and goodwill of our people to the people of China. I should like to express my gratitude for the cordial welcome that it has received from the Government and people of China.

I regret greatly that the racial policy of the Government of the Union of South Africa has continued and has led to serious developments. Our people have been intimately concerned over this policy because there are many people of Indian origin who

live in South Africa. But this question is no longer merely one of Indians in South Africa: it has already assumed a greater and wider significance. It is a question of racial domination and racial intolerance. It is a question of the future of Africans even more than that of Indians in South Africa. Delay in settling this and like questions is fraught with peril for humanity. I am glad that there has been a growth of friendly relations all over Africa between the Africans and the Indians resident there. It is our desire not to interfere in any way with the growth of the peoples of Africa but to help them to the best of our ability. I regret also that a large number of Indians, long resident in Ceylon, have been deprived of their voting rights. They claim to be as much Ceylonese citizens as other inhabitants of that country. Our ties with Ceylon go back to thousands of years and our relations with Ceylon and her people have been most friendly. We welcomed her independence and we hoped that her people would advance in every way as an independent people. But true progress will not come by depriving a large number of citizens of their natural rights. This will lead, as it has already led, to serious problems and complications.

We have for many years past suffered a shortage of food and large quantities of foodgrains have had to be imported. In this we were helped greatly by the United States of America, and we must be grateful to that great country for the generous help that it gave. For the first time in recent history, we have large stocks of food-grains (except for rice), and are building up a substantial reserve which will help us in the future in case of need. This is to be welcomed. But the failure of the rains over large parts of our country has created a difficult situation for the people there. For five successive seasons, Rayalaseema has suffered the misfortune of a drought and its greatest need today is water. Our army is doing valuable work to help the civil population by deepening wells and carrying water and in other ways. In these large areas of drought and scarcity, many minor projects have been undertaken to provide work and cheap grain shops have been opened. Wherever necessary, free food is given.

Owing to the high cost of imported foodgrains, their price has gone up. The contraction of the food subsidy has contributed in some measure to those high prices, and has caused some distress and discontent in rationed areas. To some extent this is partly counter-balanced by a general fall in prices. The limitation of food subsidies has induced Governments in various States to make a more realistic appraisal of their need for import of foodgrains, and this has led to a reduction of the demand from various States for food-grains, with its consequent result on their import. This is undoubtedly an advantage in the present and for the future. The amount saved from the food subsidies has been diverted to financing minor irrigation schemes which will yield more foodgrains in future and thus help in solving our food problem. My Government is giving the most careful attention to these matters. It has to balance immediate with future advantages. At the same time it is anxious that no distress should be caused and it will do all in its power to prevent this from happening.

The Planning Commission is now finalising its report on the Five-Year Plan. A very vital addition to this Plan has been made by the proposal to start fifty-five Community Projects throughout the country. This has been possible because of aid from the United State of America through their Technical Co-operation Plan. These Community Projects are not only intended to increase our food production but, what is even more important, to raise the whole level of community living. It is hoped that this programme will grow and cover a considerable part of India. But it can only grow if it has the full co-operation of the people and I earnestly trust that in this matter, as in implementing the other proposals of the Planning Commission, their co-operation will be forthcoming in full measure.

The integrated programme for agricultural production has made satisfactory progress. Jute production has increased considerably from 16.6 lakhs of bales in 1947-48 to 46.8 lakhs of bales in 1951-52. Cotton production has gone up during the same period from 24 lakhs bales to over 33 lakhs bales. Production of foodgrains has increased by 14 lakhs tons,

though this has been offset by drought in certain areas. Sugar production increased from 10.75 lakhs tons in 1947-48 to 13.5 lakhs tons in 1951-52. There has also been an increase in the production of steel, coal, cement and salt. India is now self-sufficient in salt and is able to export her surplus. A Central Salt Research Station is being established in Saurashtra.

The general economic situation in the country has been kept under continuous observation by my Government. In my last address to Parliament I referred to a slight fall in whole-sale prices. This trend was sharply accentuated in the months of February and March. Partly this was due to a general re-adjustment of prices all over the world, a process which started in 1950 but received a setback owing to the outbreak of the Korean war. With the prospect of an armistice in Korea in sight, this process of readjustment gathered strength. This has been assisted by an increased production of goods in the country coupled with increasing consumer resistance to high prices. The monetary and credit policy of my Government initiated with a view to checking inflation, has also contributed to the fall in prices. This sharp fall in the price level has caused difficulties to those engaged in business and industry, more especially in the textile industry. This is also leading to a fall in our export earnings. My Government are closely watching the situation to ensure that production and employment are not affected. It is their intention to take such action as might be necessary to assist in the stabilisation of prices at a reasonable level.

I am glad that a new Ministry of Production has been created. Production by State-owned industries is of vital importance and the creation of a new Ministry for this purpose indicates that special attention is going to be paid to it.

An assurance was given by Government last year to Parliament that a Press Commission would be appointed to consider various matters connected with the Press. My Government hope to appoint such a Commission in the near future. It is also proposed to place before Parliament a Bill arising out of the recommendations of the Press Laws Enquiry Committee.

This session of Parliament, will be mainly concerned with the Budget and there will probably not be much time for other legislation. A statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of the Government of India for the financial year 1952-53 will be laid before you. The members of the House of the People will be required to consider and pass the Demands for Grants.

After the last session of the provisional Parliament, it became necessary to promulgate an Ordinance relating to the repealing of the Saurashtra (Abolition of Local Sea Customs Duties and imposition of) Port Development Levy. This Ordinance will be brought before you in the form of a new Bill and you will be asked to consider and pass it. Another Ordinance was issued for the purpose of extending the Displaced Persons (Claims) Act, 1950. A Bill to replace this Ordinance will also be placed before you.

A number of Bills which were introduced in the provisional Parliament have now lapsed. Some of these will be placed before you in so far as time permits. It is also proposed to place before Parliament a Bill dealing with Preventive Detention.

One of the legislative measures which was discussed at considerable length in the provisional Parliament was the Hindu Code Bill. This could not be passed and, in common with other pending Bills, has lapsed. It is the intention of my Government to introduce afresh legislation on this subject. It is proposed, however, to divide up the Bill into certain parts and to place each part separately before Parliament, so as to facilitate its discussion and passage.

I have endeavoured to indicate to you some of the work that will be placed before this session of Parliament. I trust that your labours will bear fruit for the good of our people and that this new Parliament of the Democratic Republic of India will set an example of friendly co-operation and efficient working. Your

success will depend on the spirit of tolerance that governs your activities and the wisdom that inspires your efforts. I earnestly trust therefore that this wisdom and tolerance of spirit will always be with you.