

C Rajagopalachari Passed Away - [December 25, 1972] This Day in History

C Rajagopalachari is an important freedom fighter and so his life history should be a part of your IAS preparation. In this article, you can read his brief biography and contributions to the freedom movement for the UPSC exam.

On 25 December 1972, India's last and only Indian Governor-General Chakravarti Rajagopalachari passed away in Madras.

Early history of C Rajagopalachari

- C Rajagopalachari, also known as Rajaji or C.R., was born on 10 December 1878 in Thorapalli Agraharam, Krishnagiri District in Tamil Nadu.
- His father Chakravarti Venkataryan was the munsiff of Thorapalli, who with his wife Singamma had two other sons apart from Rajagopalachari.
- Rajagopalachari studied in elementary schools at Thorapalli and Hosur and passed his matriculation in 1891.
- In 1894, he secured a BA in Arts from Central College in Bangalore. In 1897, he graduated in law from the Presidency College, Madras.
- He started his legal career in Salem, Tamil Nadu in 1900. His interest in politics and society was ignited at that time. In 1911, he became a member of the Salem Municipality. He also served as its chairman from 1917 to 1919. It was during his tenure as chairman that the municipality got its first Dalit member, and Rajagopalachari had a big role in this development.

Role during the Independence Struggle

- He joined the Indian National Congress and participated in the 1906 session at Calcutta.
- After that, he became more involved in national politics. He took part in the anti-Rowlatt Act agitations.
- With the coming of Mahatma Gandhi into the independence movement, Rajagopalachari became a keen follower of Gandhi.
- He quit his legal practice and took part in the non-cooperation movement.
- In 1921, he became the party's General Secretary.
- He led the group of 'No changers' in the Congress Party who were against entry into the Imperial and the provincial legislative councils.
- He was also involved in the Vaikom Satyagraha.
- In the 1930s, Rajagopalachari became a leader in the Tamil Nadu Congress. When Gandhi was leading the Dandi March in 1930, Rajagopalachari made a similar march at Vedaranyam and defied the salt laws. For this, he was arrested.

- After that, he was elected the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee.
- After the 1937 elections, the INC came to power in the Madras Presidency and Rajagopalachari became the first Premier of the Madras Presidency.
- As premier, he issued the Temple Entry Authorization and Indemnity Act 1939 and removed restrictions on Dalits entering Hindu temples.
- He also passed an act to ease the burden of agricultural debt on the state's farmers.
- He also implemented Gandhi's Nai Talim scheme of education for which he was criticised citing casteist motives. Perhaps the best remembered facet of Rajagopalachari's government in Madras was the introduction of Hindi as a compulsory subject in schools. This was met with widespread protests and anti-Hindi agitations, not to mention contributing to his unpopularity in Madras.
- The protests turned ugly and two people were even killed. The governor repealed the law in 1940. Despite the censures, historians consider Rajagopalachari-led Madras as one of the best-administered provinces in British India.
- C.R. resigned from premiership when the Viceroy declared India to be a party to the Second World War without duly consulting Indians. He was arrested in December 1940.
- However, he differed with Gandhi on the issue of the Quit India Movement. He opined that dialogue with the British would be beneficial and that neutrality in the war would be harmful in the wake of a German invasion.
- He also offered a resolution to the INC-Muslim League impasse over the issue of partition in the form of the C.R. Formula.

Post Independence

- From 1946 to 1947, he was the Minister of Industry, Supply, Education and Finance in Jawaharlal Nehru's Interim government.
- In 1947, he was appointed the first Governor of West Bengal.
- For a few days in November 1947, he was made the Acting Governor-General of India in the absence of Lord Mountbatten who had gone on leave to England for a personal engagement.
- From June 1948 to 26 January 1950, he served as India's Governor-General. He was the last and only Indian to hold that office.
- He also served as the Home Affairs Minister for 10 months from December 1950.
- At this time, differences cropped up between him and Nehru and he resigned as minister and returned to Madras.
- He was appointed the Chief Minister of Madras State in 1952 despite the Congress being reduced to a minority in the assembly; and the governor of the state was criticised for this move. During his tenure as CM, there was a strong movement for a separate Andhra state. Rajagopalachari refused to relent and was oblivious to the fasting being undertaken by Potti Sriramulu. Sriramulu died as a result of the fasting, triggering widespread riots in Madras city and in the Telugu-speaking areas. Finally, Andhra state was created in 1953.

- His government became further unpopular when he introduced the controversial Modified System of Elementary Education. He eventually resigned as CM in 1954.
- In 1957, he resigned from the Congress Party. In 1959, he founded the Swatantra Party along with Murari Vaidya and Minoo Masani. He was against the leftist lean of the Nehru-led Congress, and advocated liberal policies. He was not in favour of Soviet-style socialism and also coined the term 'License-permit Raj'.
- In 1965, when the Government of India adopted Hindi as the official language, Rajagopalachari opposed this move along with other leaders like Periyar and Annadurai.
- In 1967, his Swatantra party forged an alliance with the DMK and the Forward Bloc and ousted the Congress in Madras for the first time in 30 years. CN Annadurai became the CM then.
- His party also emerged as the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha in the 1967 elections.
- His health started deteriorating in November 1972 and he passed away on 25 December 1972 aged 94.
- He was conferred the Bharat Ratna in 1955. He was referred to as 'my conscience keeper' by Gandhi.

He was a prolific writer and has several books to his credit in both Tamil and English. His abridged English versions of the Mahabharata and Ramayana are still read by children. He wrote several scholarly pieces on Hinduism. He also translated the *Thirukkural* into English. He also wrote on Socrates in Tamil. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958. Apart from literature, he contributed to music as well composing at least a couple of famous songs which are sung in Carnatic concerts today.