

NIJALINGAPPA – ARCHITECT OF KARNATAKA

The Biography of Rastrabandhu Shri Nijalingappa is also a chronicle of the national events as his career was inextricably intertwined with the march of India towards freedom. From humble beginnings Nijalingappaji climbed the ladder step by step facing hardships and hurdles that confronted him at every step. He rose to the position of the President of the Indian National Congress, to the Chief Minister of Karnataka by hard work, honesty, sincerity and total devotion to national growth and development. Unlike the western statesmen who kept meticulously a diary and left their perceptions of men and matters for the benefit of the posterity, Indian leaders seldom ever recorded contemporaneously with the events their own actions and reactions to them. So when they later write or have their biography written, they express the thoughts and ideas which they hold at the time of writing and not those at the time of occurrence. This has rendered most of those publications of little value. Keeping a diary systematically requires lot of determination and discipline. They have to be recorded before they are affected or influenced by subsequent events.

Fortunately, Nijalingappaji has kept a date-wise candid account of events that occurred as well as his own reactions to the relevant issues.

Nijalingappaji's life serves as an inspiration to younger generation. From the log-house to President of Indian National Congress and Chief Minister of Karnataka, he had struggled in life and made a success of it. He wrote to Dr. C.R.Reddi, a well-known educationist of his time and the head of the State Education Department "I come from a far away poor family. I have no support or recommendation of any important person. I passed my Matriculation in First Class" and applied for his admission in a college in Bangalore. He graduated and entered the legal profession. In his days, he could have got a job in the government easily but he preferred the legal profession, as it would enable him to devote some time for the service of the country. In those days, he was one of the juniors at the Bar who used to help the poor with legal assistance without charging fee. He was thorough and systematic in his work and life qualities, which proved to be great assets in his later life.

By far the greatest achievement of his was the unification of Karnataka. The Kannadigas were part of Maharashtra, Andhra, Kerala and Tamilnadu. Nijalingappaji sought a democratic set up in the Princely State of Mysore and laboured hard to unify the Kannadigas scattered in the neighbouring states which made him popular with both the Mysore State Congress as well as the Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee.

Nijalingappaji firmly believed in the formation of linguistic states. In this, he had the support of Sardar Patel, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah, the then Congress President, and Kamaraj of Tamilnadu. The Karnataka Ekikharana Sangha stepped up agitation on a massive scale especially in the border areas of Maharashtra, Adoni in Andhra, Hosur and Kollegal in Tamilnadu and a few other centres. The State legislatures of Maharashtra and Madras passed resolutions in favour of a unified Karnataka. Nijalingappaji spearheaded the movement. The fast unto death for a separate Andhra Province by Potti Sriramulu who died after nearly 60 days of fast led to an unprecedented violence in the entire Telugu speaking area. It forced the hands of the Central Government to concede the demand. The linguistic states were born on that day.

Nijalingappa was vilified by a group that his crusade for a unified Kannada was motivated by selfish interest. They said that Nijalingappa wanted to establish the domination of

Veerasaivas in Karnataka and the whole motive was communal; Secondly that United Karnataka was a ruse to capture political power for Veerasaivas – Thirdly Nijalingappa was himself power hungry. The entire life of sacrifice and service of Nijalingappa refutes such frivolous criticisms. In fact the jubilation that greeted the creation of a Karnataka State gives the lie to the baseless charges.

On the passing of the States Re-organization Act, the unified Karnataka became the expanded Mysore State and naturally Nijalingappa assumed the office of the Chief Minister in 1956. It is rightly said that the two periods 1956-57 and 1962-68 when he was Chief Minister of Karnataka should be taken together for an assessment of his contribution to the State of his dream. He settled the territorial disputes with the neighboring States, integrated the government services and carried out adaptation of the Laws of the areas joining the new State with the ease and skill of an expert administrator. He laid great emphasis on development of agriculture, irrigation and power. The Sharavathi Project, which he masterminded, will be remembered as long as the mountains stand and rivers flow in this sacred land of ours. His expertise in Irrigation was duly recognized by the National Development Council by appointing him as Chairman of the Committee to report on Irrigation and water rates problems of the Country.

Nijalingappa's concern for the poor was no façade but was genuine and emotional. His passion for rural industries and village upliftment programme made a deep impression on the weaker sections of the society. In short, he translated Gandhiji's ideas into practical programmes. He promoted technical and medical institutions with great zeal and enthusiasm.

In his Atulya Ghosh Memorial Lecture, Nijalingappa summed up his national economic policy, which is perhaps the best exposition of Gandhian philosophy.

The third phase of Nijalingappa's career relates to his critical role in national affairs from 1968 onwards. Though Nijalingappa's passion was for Karnataka and Kannadiga growth and resplendency, he sacrificed his personal preference in order to shoulder the not too pleasant chores of the Indian National Congress.

The suspicion that the Kamaraj plan was really a Nehru Plan doesn't bear scrutiny. Kamaraj began to feel genuinely that the concentration of all national leadership and talent on administration had deprived the Congress organisation of leadership and also mass contact. He explained to me this idea and his proposal for some leaders giving up office and devoting their time to organisational work. I was sceptical and I remarked that under his plan, only one person would demit office (meaning Kamaraj himself) and that others would smuggle back to office. It proved to be correct, as it was only Kamaraj who resigned from the office of the Chief Minister and did not get back to office. Those who lost office were very bitter with Kamaraj. They told me "Your Kamaraj Plan" is "Yamaraj Plan".

Kamaraj as President of the Congress handled the critical situation following the demise of Nehru. He tackled the situation skillfully and gave an answer to the global query "after Nehru – who?" and "after Nehru – what?" When the situation repeated itself in 1966 on the demise of Prime Minister Lalbahadur Shastri, the credit for a smooth orderly and democratic succession of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister went to him. That Indira Gandhi was the choice of Kamaraj was an open secret. In making his choice, Kamaraj told me that Indira had no regional (north-south) prejudices, had no linguistic chauvinism, had a progressive outlook on economic issues and was a charismatic election winner.

The congress organization failed to realize that a contradiction between the office of the Prime Minister and the President of the Indian National Congress was inherent after independence. During the struggle for freedom, the Congress President, its Parliamentary Board

and Working Committee were supreme. But after the emergence of a Prime Minister with enormous patronage, power and resources and Chief Ministers in the States, the centre of gravity had swung towards the later. Immediately after Independence, Congress President Tandon tried to control Prime Minister Nehru without any effect. Lalbahadur Shastri who was personally very friendly to Kamaraj, consulted him but made his own decisions on matters related to cabinet formation and administration. Indira Gandhi did not consult the Congress President Kamaraj on the cabinet but only showed him the list on her way to the Rashtrapati Bhavan for submitting the names to the President. Indira Gandhi's assertion of right to choose the President of India and her success in the presidential election established the supremacy of the Prime Minister over the Congress organization. Smaller men around her had created an unfounded (in my opinion) apprehension in her mind that Kamaraj would ease her out of office as he had done earlier to Rajaji and others in the Madras State. The strong dissent of Kamaraj to devaluation of the rupee and his open criticism of the decision further accentuated the difference between them. By the time of general elections in 1967 the rift between the Prime Minister and Congress President had become complete.

The defeat of Kamaraj in the election in 1967 sealed his fate. He had to yield his place as the President of Congress. It was at this juncture that Kamaraj persuaded Nijalingappaji to step into the hot seat of the President of Congress.

After the fall of Janata Government, its defeat in the polls and emergence of Indira Gandhi once again as a powerful figure in the political firmament of India. Nijalingappaji's close associates began to waver and desert him. Veerendra patil, whom Nijalingappaji nurtured and lifted up in political life joined Congress(I); S.K. Patil openly spoke of accepting Indira's leadership and merging Congress (O) with her outfit. Kamaraj, the bitterest critic of Indira Gandhi, was said to be thinking of making up with Indira Gandhi in order to fight against his political rival in the Tamilnadu State. Nijalingappaji alone remained uncompromising, frustration and sadness enveloped Nijalingappaji.

Nijalingappaji had a towering personality both physically and morally. His simplicity, integrity, dedication to what ever work he undertook and his strong adherence to Gandhian philosophy endeared him to all. Even those who opposed him admitted his stern sense of duty and integrity and praised him unreservedly.

Nijalingappaji stood out like a rock against all the evils that had spread into the Congress Organization such as selfishness, in-discipline, corruption and immorality. "The Gandhi Forum" which he initiated tries to spread the Ghadhian philosophy of peace, progress and harmony amongst the people of India, tried to restore the old values could not make much headway.

Nijalingappaji was pleasant and charming. He was a gentleman in politics. He loved the people and the people adored him. He has left his footprints on the sands of time as a noble role model for the younger generation to emulate. The centenary celebrations are a reminder to the present generation that it is their duty to preserve the legacy of freedom bequeathed by their forebears.