

# A revolutionary slogan that reverberated



**G. Ramakrishnan, member, Political Leadership Committee, CPI (M). For contact: [grcpim@gmail.com](mailto:grcpim@gmail.com)**

It takes an ideology for a movement to get rooted on the ground and flourish among the people. There were several leaders who espoused such an ideology which propounded that the country's freedom alone was not sufficient and that social and economic freedom and socialism were the real solution. N. Sankaraiah holds an important slot among those leaders who propagated the ideology and developed the Communist movement in its initial and subsequent phases. He had worked jointly with the first-generation leaders of the Communist movement such as P. Ramamurti, P. Jeevanandham, B. Srinivasa Rao and K. P. Janaki Ammal. Sankaraiah's life history is not that of an individual, but a part of the Tamil Nadu's Communist movement.

## **Freedom-fighter**

While pursuing his undergraduate course in American College, Madurai, Sankaraiah mobilised fellow students and launched an agitation against the British government as part of the nationwide freedom struggle. He was arrested 15 days before his final degree examination. Once I asked how he had felt at the time of arrest, he replied in a cool tone, “I went to jail elated at the thought of the country’s freedom. I did not worry about my degree course then.”

## **Prominent leader**

A member of the undivided Communist Party in 1940, Sankaraiah was elected as the party’s secretary of Madurai district in 1944. He was one of 32 comrades who quit the undivided Communist Party over ideological differences. When the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was established, he was selected for the first central committee. He had been a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Tamil Nadu three times - 1967, 1977 and 1980. He had also worked as general secretary and later as president of the All-India Kisan Sabha for several years.

## **Resolution on Tamil as official language**

Speaking on a resolution proposed in the Assembly in 1967, Sankaraiah said, “Tamil should be made the judiciary and administrative language as also the medium of instruction in educational institutions. That is the meaning of an official language. But it is not sufficient to pass a resolution on this count. In fact, a resolution containing measures to implement it

in the next five years must be passed.” The then Chief Minister C. N. Annadurai accepted his demand and accordingly a resolution was passed. The voice that Sankaraiah raised for Tamil as official language was very vital and vibrant.

### **Right solution, objective suggestion**

Way back in 1996, the then Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, convened an all-party meeting to stall the caste clashes in southern districts. I took part along with Sankaraiah in the two-day meeting held at Rajaji Hall. Speaking at the meeting, Sankaraiah said, “The menace of untouchability should be abolished. Caste clashes should be ended. Measures should be taken to make the people live united.” The order of priorities he spoke about was very important and meaningful because caste clashes cannot be ended without abolishing the atrocities including untouchability. Karunanidhi, in his speech, quoted Sankaraiah’s words and assured that the government would take measures as suggested by Sankaraiah. Later on, the CM established the samathuvapurams ( a Government scheme to build housing colonies where people belonging to various castes and religions would co-exist). But Sankaraiah had walked the talk, making his own family a samathuvapuram.

Be it party meetings or all-party meetings, Sankaraiah was able to come up with proper solutions to problems through his own experience.

When Coimbatore was rocked by bomb blasts and subsequent religious riots in 1998, a telephonic call from the CM’s office came through to the CPI (M) office, seeking to connect with Sankaraiah. While talking to him, Karunanidhi said, “N.S! It’s you

that I'm talking to first for consultations over this problem (Coimbatore tension) because you are always giving your objective suggestions”

Thus we have on several occasions witnessed the acumen, knowledge and experience in Sankaraiah, with which he used to give ideas and suggestions without any tinge of partiality and bias.

### **A member who respected high command**

After Sankaraiah was relieved as state secretary of the party, N. Varadarajan succeeded him. Later I donned the mantle. The present incumbent is K. Balakrishnan.

Sankaraiah, after his tenure as state secretary, was quite scrupulous and sincere in following the decisions taken by the state and central executive committees and by the state committee. If anyone asked him about the party's decisions, he would say, “Better ask the state secretary.” Even if invited to party-related programmes or events, he would give his consent for participation only after getting the party executive committee's approval. Such was his unconditional respect for the party executive committee and the secretary as well.

### **All are comrades**

Well before my birth, he had been in the Communist party. When A. Nallasivam was the party state secretary, I was selected as a member of the state executive committee. At that time, I had an opportunity to move closely with Sankaraiah. Though a veteran

Communist leader, he was simple enough to interact with members of the party irrespective of age and position. The way he would speak and move was motivating and inspiring to young comrades. He was a link between the first generation and the present one. He would remember all party activists and their family members as well. His memory power was so keen that he enquired about all of them, mentioning their names exactly.

A voracious literary reader, Sankaraiah had the acumen of discussing not only politics but also literature. Karunanidhi got his foreword to his book, a poetic version of Maxim Gorky's novel 'Thaai'.

### **Revolutionary slogan**

Sankaraiah had worked in the Communist party with passion and dedication for 82 years. He could not take part in the function held to mark the renovation of a part of the party state committee office on November 7, 2023. We broadcast his greeting message. In his stentorian voice, he had finished off his text with 'Inquilab Zindabad' (Long Live Revolution). That was the slogan that resounded before the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev.

Now the real tribute we can pay Sankaraiah is to carry forward the slogan that he raised in his last speech seven days before his death.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**