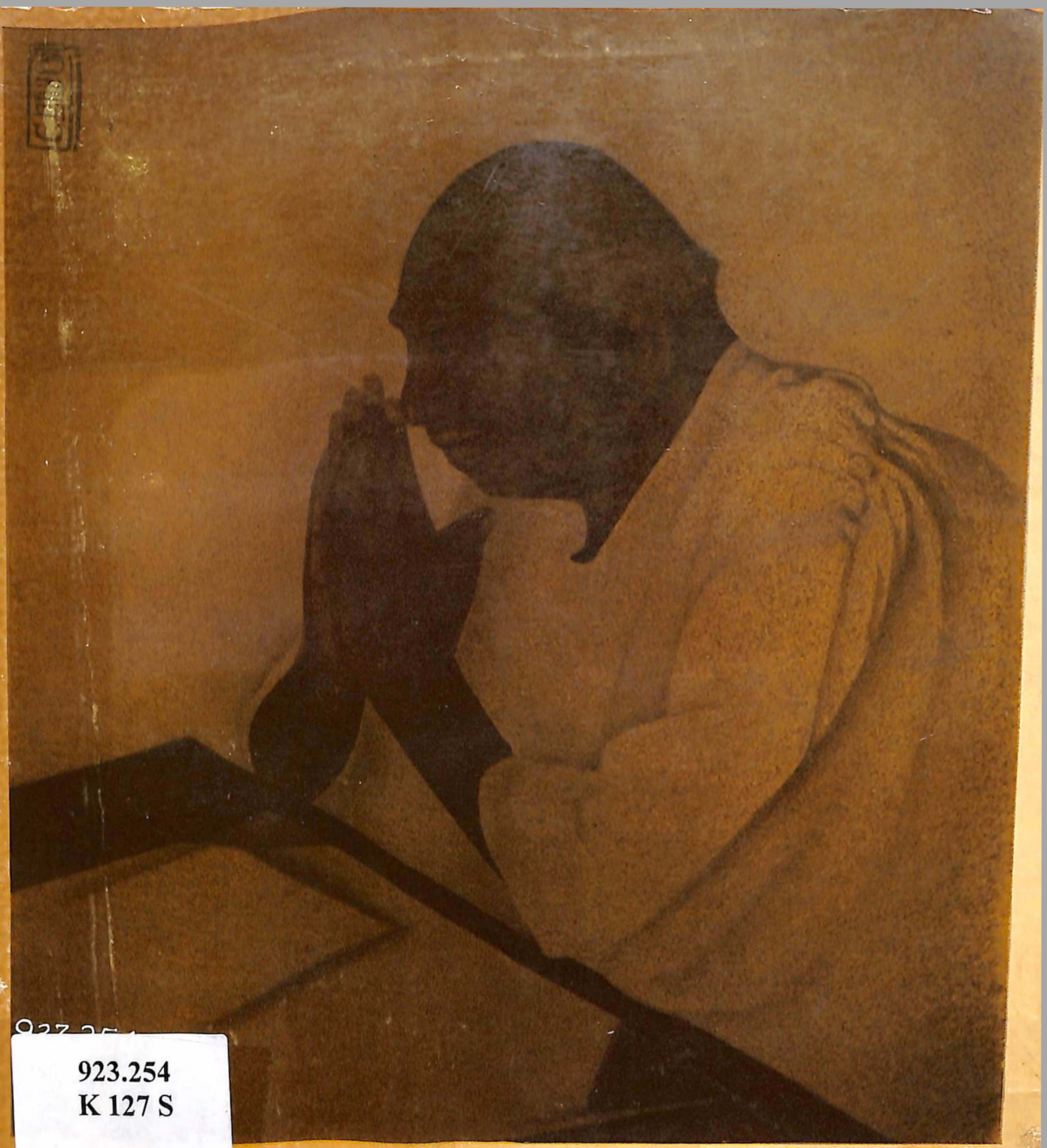

KAMARAJ

SYMBOL OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF
ADVANCED STUDY
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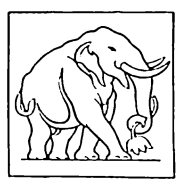
KAMARAJ

SYMBOL OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY

P. S. SUBBARAMAN



POPULAR PRAKASHAN

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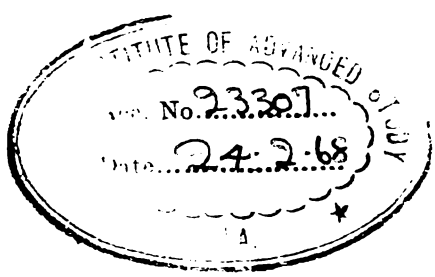

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PREFACE

AMONG the foreign statesmen who travelled to Delhi in January 1966 to join the people of India in mourning Lal Bahadur Shastri's death were Vice President Hubert Humphrey of the United States and Chairman Alexei Kosygin of the Soviet Union. They called on President Radhakrishnan, on Mr. Gulzarilal Nanda, the acting Prime Minister, and on the widow of the Indian leader who had died within hours of signing the Tashkent Declaration.

The two statesmen, representing the two mightiest nations of the world, also called on Kumaraswami Kamaraj, a big, swarthy man of 63 clad in simple home-spun cotton, son of a petty tradesman, with hardly six years of schooling, who is President of India's ruling Congress Party. Both invited him to visit their respective countries, Mr. Humphrey hailing him as "one of the greatest political leaders in all the free countries of the world."

What manner of man is Kamaraj, and what has made him the symbol of Indian democracy and of India's peaceful social revolution?

The question has intrigued many, in India and outside. My attempt in the pages that follow is to present the life and work of Kamaraj in the context first of his home State of Madras and then of the larger national scene. The book is designed as an introduction to a personality who has been playing a leading part in the shaping of India's destiny after the passing of Jawaharlal Nehru, rather than as an exhaustive biography.

New Delhi
15 August, 1966

P. S. SUBBARAMAN

I. Humble Origin

KAMARAJ was born a Nadar. This statement will have meaning for those who are familiar with the social history of the Tamil-speaking people of Madras State. It will mean little to other Indians, let alone foreigners.

The Nadars were among the humble castes of the Tamil region, corresponding to lowly social strata known by other names in other linguistic regions of the country. In addition to the vertical divisions of religion and language, Indian society was for centuries divided horizontally into innumerable strata of so-called high and low castes, including the lowest of the low who were classified as untouchables. Though centuries of racial mixture had made nonsense of any theory of distinct ethnic strains, the higher castes were supposed to be of Aryan descent, while the lower castes were deemed to be descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of India prior to the invasion and settlement of the country by the Aryans.

A man or woman born in a given caste could only follow the occupation traditionally ordained for that caste. The son of a washerman was condemned to be a washer-boy. So strong was the hold of tradition that it would not even occur to him to train for a more rewarding profession: education beyond the three R's was for the higher castes.

Members of different castes would live in separate parts of a village or township and worship their different gods in separate temples; they would not dine in each other's houses, and certainly not inter-marry.

Though the hierarchy of caste based on occupation was a historical development peculiar to Hindu society, so strong

was the hold of caste that it continued to affect the social attitudes even of those who converted to Christianity, Islam or Sikhism. Within living memory, some churches in India have had separate pews for untouchable brethren; Muslims would inter-marry only within the caste of their Hindu origin; and untouchable Sikhs were a class apart from other members of the faith.

The Nadars were not as lowly as the untouchables, but not very much higher in the social scale. They were deemed not to be of Aryan descent, and therefore not entitled to enter and worship in the temples of the higher castes among Hindus. The question was put to legal test at the turn of the last century, and the verdict under the then British Indian law went against the Nadars. The democratic, egalitarian Constitution of independent India was still a half-century away.

Shanan, standing for toddy-tapper, was the earlier name of the Nadar caste. When a group of shanans tried to assert their right to worship at the Kamudi temple (in the present Ramnad district of Madras where Kamaraj was born), the sub-judge at Madurai turned down their claim. They went in appeal to the High Court at Madras. The judgment of the High Court, delivered in 1898, gives a picture of the rigidly stratified society into which Kamaraj was born.

Holding that Nadar, literally meaning the rulers of a country or village, was a self-assumed title, the judgment said that all Nadars were in fact shanans, and that there was no substance in their claim to be descendants of kshatriyas (the warrior caste, ranking immediately below the top brahmin or priestly caste in the traditional caste hierarchy).

The High Court judgment read: "The shanans have, as a class, from time immemorial been devoted to the cultivation of the palmyra palm and to the collection of juice and manufacture of liquor from it. There are no grounds what-

ever for regarding them as of Aryan origin. Their worship was a form of demonology, and their position in general social estimation appears to have been just above that of pallas, pariahs and chakkiliyans (farm serfs, scavengers and cobblers), who are on all hands regarded as unclean and prohibited from the use of the Hindu temples, and below that of vellalas, maravars (cultivators) and other classes admitted to worship in the Hindu temples. According to the Agama Shastras (Vedic scriptures) which are received as authoritative by worshippers of Siva in the Madurai district, entry into a temple where the ritual prescribed by these Shastras is observed is prohibited to all those whose profession is the manufacture of intoxicating liquor and the climbing of palmyra and coconut trees.

"No doubt many of the shanans have abandoned their hereditary professions and have won for themselves by education, industry and frugality, respectable positions as traders and merchants and even as vakils (pleaders in local courts) and clerks; and it is natural to feel sympathy for their efforts to obtain social recognition and to rise to what is regarded as a higher form of religious worship. But such sympathy will not be increased by unreasonable and unfounded pretensions; and, in the effort to rise, the shanans must not invade the established rights of other castes. They have temples of their own, and are numerous enough and strong enough in wealth and education to arise along their own lines and without appropriating the institutions and infringing the rights of others, and in so doing they will have the sympathy of all right-minded men and, if necessary, the protection of the courts."

If this sounds like the hypocritical 'separate but equal' philosophy of racial segregation which is still preached in South Africa and in some parts of the United States, that is exactly what it was. The British had no interest in reforming Indian social laws by removing inequalities and discrimination. Their policy was one of calculated non-interference in the social status quo, since they could utilise the divisions in Indian society to play off one section against

the other and preserve their own supremacy.

In accordance with the policy of divide-and-rule, the British in South India initially relied on the Brahmins, who were the first to take to Western education. For several decades following the establishment of direct rule by the British Crown in the middle of the 19th century, the Brahmins virtually monopolised the white-collar and technical professions. They manned the top positions in the civil service and the judiciary, and dominated the professions of teaching, law, medicine and engineering. When the Brahmin dominance led to a reaction on the part of the non-Brahmin higher castes, the British found it expedient to encourage the anti-Brahmin Justice Party because the Brahmins had begun to take an active part in the nationalist movement.

Neither of these elite groups did anything to raise the educational and social level of the most depressed castes including the untouchables. India's social revolution had to await the coming of Mahatma Gandhi. He not only led India's non-violent struggle for independence; he freed Indian society from the blight of untouchability. He gave untouchables the name Harijans ('children of god'), and launched a movement of temple entry and social reform which culminated in the abolition of all forms of untouchability and caste privilege under the Constitution which free India adopted in 1950.

II. Backward Tract

If the caste into which Kamaraj was born was humble, the place of his birth was in most inhospitable terrain.

Virudunagar, where he was born on 15 July 1903, lies in the Ramnad district of Madras, on the eastern coast in the deep south of India. The neighbouring districts of Thanjavur and Tiruchi are watered by the Kaveri; Madurai is fed by the Vaigai and Tirunelveli by Tambraparni, but Ramnad has no perennial river. It is the most arid part of Madras State, growing only chillies, short-staple cotton and some rain-fed coarse grains but little of rice, the Tamil people's staple food.

A district gazetteer of British days says about Ramnad: "It is a dry district and nothing in the scenery will interest a visitor. The coastal area is a vast sandy belt. The other wasteland is bare and bleak. There are no perennial rivers. Poor soil, inadequate rainfall and the absence of perennial irrigation have made agriculture a real gamble." It adds that the people are hard working; they have had to be, in order to eke a living out of the harsh environment. In the early part of this century many people of the humbler castes migrated from Ramnad to other parts of Madras State, and even to Ceylon, to improve their fortunes.

The traditional occupations of the Nadars included, besides the tapping of toddy, wood-cutting for firewood and charcoal and the production of salt from sea water. Over the years they took to trading, and many of them established themselves as wholesale merchants in a wide range of agricultural commodities. They have also developed match manufacture as a small-scale industry; some have gone into newspaper publishing with notable success. Even to this

day, however, Ramnad is a relatively backward district. Its principal urban centres—Virudunagar, Ramnad, Rajapalayam and Sivaganga—are small municipal towns in contrast to Tamil cities like Coimbatore and Tiruchi. The backwardness of the district at the beginning of the century, when Kamaraj was born, was much more acute.

This was an ironic reversal of fortunes. Time was when Ramnad, with the neighbouring districts of Madurai and Tirunelveli, formed the core of the great Pandya kingdom with its capital at Madurai. Together with the Chera (present-day Kerala) and Chola kingdoms, the Pandyas were among the chief political powers in South India at the dawn of history.

Emperor Asoka's rock inscriptions (3rd century B.C.) mention the three Tamil kingdoms as independent neighbours of his Mauryan empire. The Pandya country was known to Megasthenes even earlier in the 4th century B.C. The oldest extant Tamil literary works, known as Sangam literature, take their name from the sangam or academy of scholars and poets who were maintained at Madurai by the Pandya kings. There was commerce with the Greeks and Romans, and some foreigners (referred to as yavanas in the old Tamil literature) were employed as sentries in the royal palaces at Madurai.

Political and cultural contact with the North Indian kingdoms was also extensive. The Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang, who travelled in South India in the 7th century, wrote about the existence of Jain communities in the Pandya country. The Pandyas, like the Cholas, sometimes extended their sway to Ceylon. They also had cultural and trade links with the Far Eastern kingdom of Sumatra. Despite internecine wars, the Tamil kingdoms enjoyed a high degree of prosperity and civilization, attested by the magnificent temple architecture and sculpture of South India as well as the record of their overseas trade.

The Tamil kingdoms declined after the Muslim inroads of the 14th century. A Pandyan king, Parakrama, was taken captive and removed to Delhi; and in 1329 Jalaluddin Ahsan

Shah set himself up as Sultan of Madurai. But the Sultanate was short-lived, and the Pandya country came under the sway of the new Hindu empire of Vijayanagar. Four centuries and much turmoil later, the British East India Company emerged triumphant from the struggles with local rulers and its Dutch, French and Portuguese rivals for the control of India.

Descendants of the Pandya rajas were among the last to be subdued by the British. The battle of Kalaiyarkoil, where Veerapandya Kattabomman held the British in a heroic action, was a source of inspiration to subsequent fighters for freedom. Among the patriots of this century nurtured on the old Pandya soil are Subramanya Bharathi, the poet of Indian nationalism who is for the Tamils what Rabindranath Tagore is to Bengalis, and V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, who built up an Indian shipping line against all the odds and impediments created by the British rulers who would not lightly allow the monopoly of British shipping interests to be broken.

Kamaraj belongs to this soil and to this tradition.

III. Shop Assistant to Freedom Fighter

Kumaraswami, the father of Kamaraj, was a coconut merchant at Virudupatti (the small town replaced the humble 'patti' by the higher-sounding 'nagar' as it grew larger). He died when Kamaraj, the first child, was only six. An uncle, who ran a cloth shop, shared the guardianship of the boy and of his only sister, Nagammal, with the widowed mother.

Kamaraj's schooling lasted barely six years. When he was twelve, mother and uncle decided that Kamaraj had learnt enough of reading, writing and arithmetic to start working as an apprentice in the cloth shop. Ambition, which in those days was strictly proportionate to the level of one's caste in the social hierarchy, soared no higher.

The teenaged shop assistant was, however, soon to be fired by ambition of quite another kind, the ambition to participate in the fight which had started for India's freedom.

Kamaraj was 15 when he heard of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. It took place in the city of Amritsar in far-away Punjab. Thousands of people had assembled within the walls of a garden to hear nationalist leaders. They had no weapons with them. Suddenly an English general with a company of soldiers posted himself at the gate of the park and ordered his men to open fire. There was no means of escape for the trapped gathering. Several hundred people were shot dead and many more wounded. This outrage shocked the entire country, and young Kamaraj in the small South Indian town of Virudunagar was among the millions who were touched to the quick.

Two years later, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the London-trained barrister who had shed his lawyer's trappings

for a bare loin-cloth as leader of India's struggle for independence, visited the nearby town of Madurai. Kamaraj, like many another future leader of India, was overwhelmingly influenced by Gandhi's simplicity, dedication and fearlessness. The young enthusiast enrolled himself in the Indian National Congress, and became an active volunteer worker.

He communicated something of his new zeal to his companions. They were many, because Kamaraj's interests had been varied: wrestling, kite-flying, fishing and swimming. The young men would gather within the precincts of the temple at Virudunagar (see picture facing page 16), or outside, at the corner snuff-shop where the temple walls met. There Kamaraj would urge his friends to join him in fund-raising for the Congress at railway platforms, and to participate in Congress rallies in the district.

Kamaraj's mother and uncle were anxious at the turn his interests were taking. They wanted him to marry, hoping that would keep him away from politics and trouble. But the young man put them off, telling them laughingly: "Let the country first become free." Kamaraj was forty-four when independence came, and he has stayed a bachelor.

At the age of twenty he became something more than a small-town youth leader when Sundaresa Satyamurti, a leading figure of the Tamilnad Congress Party, picked him as a lieutenant in 1923. Kamaraj travelled with Satyamurti through the length and breadth of the Tamil country, organizing meetings and demonstrations.

Imprisonment from time to time was part of the lot of every freedom fighter. Jail going started for Kamaraj at a young age, and the last imprisonment was in 1942 during the 'Quit India' campaign. He has spent a total of eight years in British jails during six spells of imprisonment.

It was not until 1937 that the British conceded a measure of provincial autonomy and elections on limited suffrage. In the years preceding this, while the Congress Party was tread-

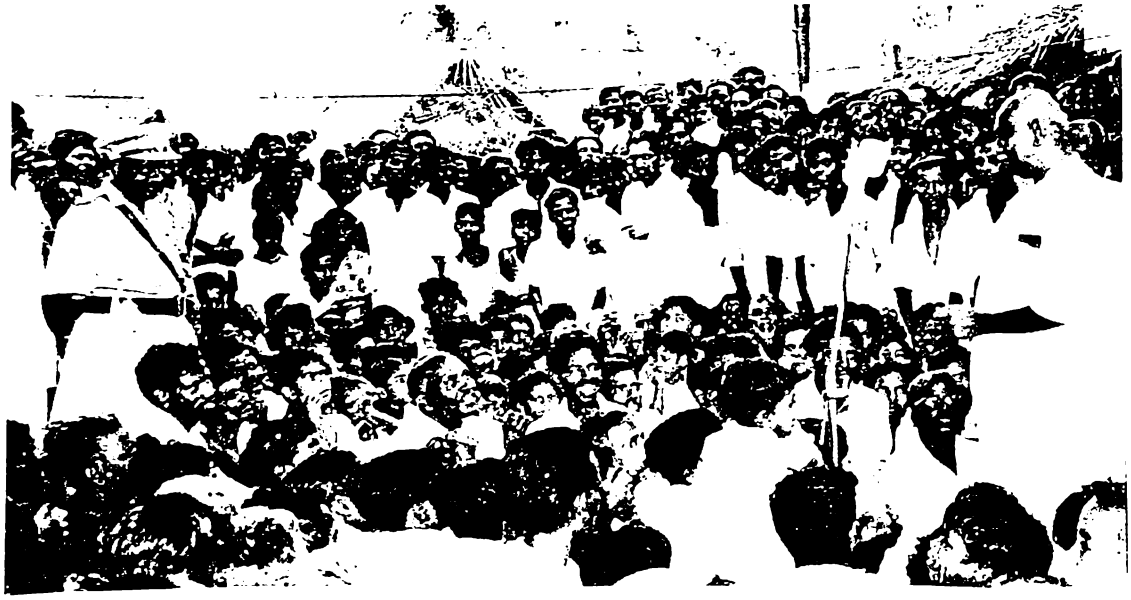
ing the hard road of struggle for freedom, collaborationist politics based on caste offered a temptingly attractive avenue for the non-Brahmin elite of South India. The Justice Party, which held power in Madras, spoke in the name of all castes other than the Brahmins, but in fact it represented the wealthy and 'loyal' elements among the non-Brahmin castes. This was proved by the 1937 elections in which the Congress won a sweeping victory.

It is notable that though Kamaraj had a special appeal to members of the lower castes, being himself a Nadar, he did not yield to the lure of caste politics. He has always placed the national above sectional interests. When he voluntarily retired in October 1963 from an unbroken and successful nine-year stewardship of Madras as Chief Minister, it was in order to strengthen the Congress Party to face the growing threat from the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The DMK, which purports to see the 'Dravidian' people of the South as being dominated by the Aryan North and the South Indian Brahmins as an Aryan fifth-column, at one stage advocated secession of the Southern States from the Indian Union to form an independent Dravidastan. Together with the Communists, who have from time to time made election alliances with the DMK, the Kazhagam posed a challenge to democracy and national unity. The challenge, Kamaraj felt, could be countered only by a revitalised Congress Party. But more of this later.

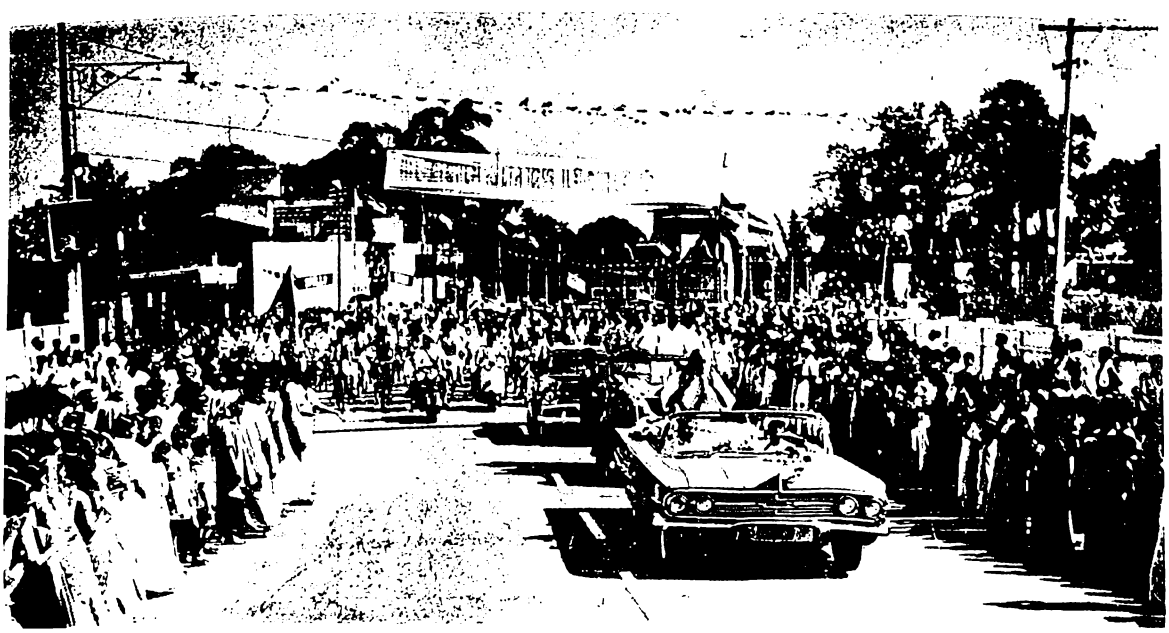
The Congress Party formed a popular Ministry in Madras, as in other provinces of India, following the 1937 elections. The Congress Ministries resigned in 1939, in protest against India's involvement in the second world war without any guarantee that the war being fought by the Allies in the name of freedom would mean freedom for India from British rule. During this period, from 1936 to 1940, Kamaraj was secretary of the Tamilnad Congress Committee. The key to the party machine in Tamilnad has remained in his hands ever since.

In 1940 he won the contest for presidentship of the Tamil-

The temple of Virudanagar where young Kamaraj and colleagues used to gather during the freedom struggle. Below : *Mother and son*



Talking to villagers (top); *send-off at a small-town railway platform* (middle); *in a city procession* (bottom).



nad Congress Committee against a rival backed by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the Tamil leader of all-India eminence who had been Chief Minister of Madras (he now heads the conservative Swatantra Party). The ascendancy of Kamaraj in Tamilnad's leadership was confirmed during the 'Quit India' movement launched by the Congress in 1942, from which Rajagopalachari kept aloof. Students and the working class, except for the section led by the Communists who kept out of the national struggle, played a prominent part in the 1942 movement. They looked to Kamaraj as the symbol of their aspiration for the building of a democratic socialist order in a free India.

The rise of Kamaraj to the leadership of the Congress Party in Madras was a sign of completion of the process of its transformation from an organisation representing the upper layers of society into a party of the masses. The process had begun in the 'twenties, with the return of Mahatma Gandhi to India from South Africa and his assumption of the leadership of the nationalist movement. The Congress Party had till then been a forum of the well-to-do, educated urban gentry, who petitioned the British Crown for mild steps towards self-government. As Kamaraj has said, Gandhi "not only spread the message of freedom to the farthest corners of India, but also devoted his attention to the eradication of poverty and misery among the masses. When the masses realised that the Congress stood for the betterment of their economic condition and for their social progress, they joined the organisation in large numbers and gave their massive support."

Kamaraj has not been an organiser of trade unions or kisan sabhas (associations of poor cultivators and landless workers), but he has always supported their efforts to improve wages and working conditions. Because of his identification with the common man, he enjoys the trust of the working classes, both rural and urban.

Following the end of the second world war and the release of Congress leaders from jail, fresh elections were held

in 1946 and the Congress again swept the polls in Madras. Kamaraj played a leading part in the election campaign and the formation of a new Congress Government. There were frequent changes in the Chief Ministership till 1954, when Kamaraj himself headed the government.

The political instability was due largely to the fact that Madras was at that time a large composite State incorporating several Telugu-speaking and Malayalam-speaking districts besides the Tamil districts. The conflict of interest between legislators from the different linguistic regions resulted in a constant shift of loyalties. The Telugu-speaking districts were detached from Madras in 1953 to form a new Andhra State, while the Malayalam-speaking districts were attached to the new State of Kerala in 1956.

Madras saw as many as four Chief Ministers from 1946 to 1954: Tanguturi Prakasam, Ramaswami Reddiar, Kumaraswami Raja and Rajagopalachari. Kamaraj played such an important part in the successive leadership elections of the Congress legislature party of Madras that he acquired the dubious title of 'king-maker'. Many wondered whether he was capable of providing constructive leadership of the administration, or would remain behind the scenes as a party boss. Kamaraj was soon to provide the answer.

IV. New-Style Administrator

When Kamaraj was elected leader of the Madras Congress legislature party and became Chief Minister early in 1954, he was the first non-English knowing person to head the administration in any part of India.

Though the Congress is a party with a mass following, members of Congress governments had been drawn largely from the urban, modernised, English-educated elite. Even now, most members of the Central Cabinet and of the State Ministries are highly educated men and women, several of whom have studied at British and American universities. English is the effective link language for the leaders of all-India political parties from different parts of the country, as indeed it is for all educated Indians.

Kamaraj, in contrast, was a rustic who knew only a little English—what he had learnt during the years of enforced leisure in jail during 1942-45. Nor did he know more than a smattering of Hindi, which was soon to become the officially proclaimed link language of the country. He could speak and write fluently only in Tamil.

Could such a man head the administration? Senior civil servants, who pride themselves on the quality of their English in the 'notings' on files, wondered. So did others, who felt concerned by the question whether a person without a sound formal education could comprehend and decide wisely on complex questions of economic and social policy.

When Kamaraj laid down office as Chief Minister nine years later, Madras not only retained its reputation as one of the best administered States in India but also topped other States in social and economic development, specially in educa-

tional expansion and rural electrification.

What was the secret of Kamaraj's success?

It was his style of work, which has been described variously as direct democracy, mass contact or keeping close to the grassroots.

Kamaraj has visited every district, every taluk (district sub-division), every block (the smaller community development unit of about 100 villages) and almost every single village of Madras State, not once but several times. He has been doing this as party organiser, as Chief Minister and now as President of the Congress Party. He knows the Tamil land and the people as he knows the palm of his hand.

"People tell me," he once remarked, "that I was not educated. I don't claim that I went to a university. But I do know geography. I know most of the areas of Tamilnad. I know where the rivers are and where the water tanks are. I know in which town people make a living which way. Are these things not geography, and only the books which contain straight and curved lines?"

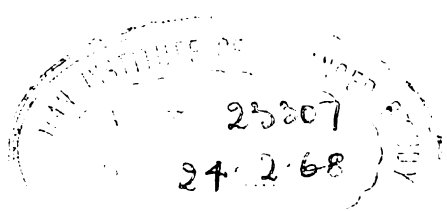
It is this closeness to the people which explains why Kamaraj has never known electoral defeat. He was first elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly—unopposed—in 1937. In 1941, when he was under detention, the citizens of Virudunagar elected him as chairman of the municipality in defiance of his British jailors. Kamaraj was elected again to the Madras Assembly in the elections of 1946, and was chosen by the State legislature as a member of the Constituent Assembly of India. The first post-independence general election of 1952 was held on the basis of universal adult franchise under the new Constitution, making India the world's largest democracy. Kamaraj won a seat in the Lok Sabha, the directly elected lower house of India's Parliament. In the subsequent two general elections of 1957 and 1962, when he was Chief Minister of Madras, he was re-elected to the State Assembly.

Elevation to public office often has the effect, in India as in other countries, of making a leader less accessible to the people, with a consequent loss of first-hand knowledge of their needs and hopes. Kamaraj did not allow this to happen. He remained as close as before to the people, and to the Congress Party rank-and-file. It is characteristic of Kamaraj that on becoming Chief Minister in 1954 he did not move from his modest suburban home in Mambalam to the palatial official residence of the Chief Minister on the Cooum river, near the famed Madras beach.

No. 8, Tirumalai Pillai Road, which he occupied in 1948, continues to be his home in Madras. It has been an open house for any citizen with a problem, whether a widow with a difficulty about getting her child admitted to college, a retired government employee with his pension payment delayed, an industrialist with a project needing government support, or a trade union official with a victimisation grievance.

R. Venkataraman, who served in the Kamaraj Cabinet as Minister of Industries and has continued to play a dynamic role in the industrialisation of the State in that capacity, says about Kamaraj's people-oriented approach to administration: "He has never allowed any laws, rules or regulations to stand in the way of doing the right thing. Oftentimes during the course of administration many came and represented against the tyranny of some executive orders. He was advised by officialdom that the requirements of rules, laws and regulations had been complied with, and that the consequent situations were either inevitable or irremediable. On those occasions when Kamaraj felt that the grievances were genuine or that the hardships should be remedied, he never hesitated to have the rules changed or the regulations modified in order to see that justice was done."

Though 'parkalam' (Tamil for "let us see") is the vaguely encouraging expression with which Kamaraj concludes interviews with callers, whose personal requests or political proposals might range from the reasonable to the fantastic, he is a man of quick decision. Officials who served under him were



greatly impressed by this quality. One of them has said: "If you are discussing a problem with him and if he gets up and tucks his dhoti (the simple cotton wrap-around which the Madrasi ordinarily wears) tighter round his waist, you can be sure he has already made up his mind on what to do."

Kamaraj is immune to the long-windedness to which politicians in India as elsewhere are prone. When invited to lay the cornerstone for a factory building or break the ground for an irrigation dam, Kamaraj would not make a long speech. Instead he would call the engineers and project officials, ask about the schedule of construction, and get them to promise to make every effort to complete the work ahead of the target date.

Holding education to be the birthright of every child, he made it one of his principal tasks as Chief Minister to bring about universal and free schooling in Madras. As the result of his efforts, the percentage of children of school-going age who are actually attending school is higher in Madras than the all-India average. In the age group from six to eleven, it is nearly 100 per cent in respect of boys and 75 per cent in respect of girls, against the national average of 78 per cent and 56 per cent respectively.

This has been achieved through a doubling of the number of schools, as well as fee exemptions for the poor and incentives in the form of free mid-day meals and the supply of school uniforms.

Madras devotes a larger percentage of its budget to education than any other State. Expenditure from the State's revenue increased from Rs. 103 million in 1956 to Rs. 252 million in 1962.

Kamaraj had a survey carried out in 1957 to ascertain the distribution of school facilities. It showed that of the 15,000 villages in the State, there were 6,000 without primary schools. He saw to it that every habitation with a population of 300

and above was provided with a primary school within a distance of a mile.

The opening of schools was not enough to ensure enrolment and attendance. Kamaraj knew that compulsion would bear harshly on the rural poor, who often have to put children of nine or ten on wage-earning jobs. A starving child could not be expected to attend school or benefit by the instruction. He therefore pioneered the scheme of free mid-day meals at school. Local committees were formed in each school community to mobilise public donations in cash and kind, and the Government contributed the balance to provide a wholesome mid-day meal to every child. The scheme, which is assisted by the American voluntary organisation CARE, began in 1957 with some 230,000 children in 8,000 schools; it now covers 1,700,000 children in 30,000 schools.

Another incentive was the offer of free clothing to poor students. It was found that a number of children, particularly girls, fought shy of attending school for want of proper clothing. More than 800,000 poor children are now supplied with free school uniforms.

It was necessary to make education free before it could be made compulsory. Beginning with fee concessions for children from backward castes, full exemption from school fees was introduced in 1955 for all children of parents with a monthly income of less than a hundred rupees. A phased programme of compulsory elementary education was taken up in 1960, after a realistic basis for universal and free schooling had thus been laid.

The other great change to which Kamaraj applied himself was a reduction of the disparity in civic amenities between town and country, through electrification of the villages. Dark streets and homes dimly lit by smoky lamps are no longer their lot. With all but a few hundred of its 15,000 villages electrified, Madras occupies the first position in this respect among the States of the Indian Union.

Kamaraj dedicated himself to the spread of education and rural electrification not merely because these are basic social services; he saw them as the agents of economic development. He knew that there could be no improvement in the standard of living of India's large and growing population without a radical improvement in the productivity of agriculture and the development of industries. Rural electrification has led to the installation of some 500,000 pumps for irrigation in Madras. What used to be a food-deficit State now has a marginal surplus over its requirement of foodgrains, despite the increase meanwhile in population. And the spread of education has provided skilled manpower for the new industries which are coming up.

The transformation of the State's economy which used to be primarily agricultural, with few industries other than textile mills, owes much to the support given by the Government to private entrepreneurs. Kamaraj as Chief Minister initiated the policy of participation by the State Industrial Investment Corporation in the share capital of private enterprise. Together with public sector projects like the mining of lignite at Neyveli and the tank factory at Avadi, the new industries are rapidly changing the face of the ancient Tamil country.

V. The 'Kamaraj Plan'

'HIGH COMMAND', paradoxically, was the military-sounding title by which the Working Committee (national executive) of the Congress Party was popularly known during the years of India's non-violent struggle for freedom. Newspapers continue to use the expression to this day, not without reason.

Even after independence, when the Central Government became the source of power and policy, the Congress Working Committee has continued to play a role far more important than that of the Labour Party's national executive in Britain or of the Democratic Party's national executive in the United States. It was the Congress Working Committee which decided on the procedure for the election of a new Prime Minister when Jawaharlal Nehru died in May 1964, and again when Lal Bahadur Shastri died in January 1966. Even on less momentous questions, informal discussion in the Congress Working Committee, which includes party organisers and some Chief Ministers of States besides prominent members of the Central Cabinet, often precedes formal Government decision. In March 1966, for instance, it was the Congress Working Committee which recommended that the State of Punjab be split into two on the basis of Punjabi-speaking and Hindi-speaking areas; Government action followed shortly.

Kamaraj became a member of the 'High Command' as far back as in 1949. He was then 46, a relatively young age in which to join the company of such veterans of the freedom movement as Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru in the Congress Working Committee.

In this capacity, and subsequently as Chief Minister of

Madras, Kamaraj attracted the attention and won the respect of Nehru. India's federal structure entails close collaboration between the Central and State Governments in the administration of the many subjects of 'concurrent' jurisdiction. The drawing up and implementation of the Five Year Plans of economic development have made constant Centre-States consultation even more necessary. Nehru as Prime Minister and Kamaraj as Chief Minister of Madras were therefore thrown together a great deal, apart from their association in the Congress Working Committee.

Over the years, Nehru's philosophy of a humane, democratic socialism powerfully influenced Kamaraj. Nehru in turn was deeply impressed by the practical ability and pragmatism of Kamaraj, his earthy wisdom and dedication. "There is something positively great in Kamaraj," Nehru once said, "which has enabled him to overcome all handicaps and lead in the service of the people."

Many in India were surprised, but Nehru was not, when Kamaraj decided in June 1963 to lay down office as Chief Minister and devote himself to strengthening the Congress Party organisation in Madras. He suggested to Nehru that it would do the party good if, like himself, several prominent Congress leaders should leave executive posts for organisational work at the grassroots. This suggestion came to be known as the 'Kamaraj Plan'.

Kamaraj felt that the Congress might lose its majority in the legislatures of many States in the general election due in 1967, unless the party was revitalised. In his own State, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) had won as many as 50 out of the 205 Assembly seats in the 1962 election, on a plank which was the opposite of democracy and national unity. The DMK appealed to a narrow, anti-Brahmin caste solidarity, and to anti-North and anti-Hindi sentiment. It followed up its impressive gain in the 1962 election with efforts to reach an electoral understanding with the Communists for the 1967 election, though there is nothing in common between the two except the desire to overthrow the Congress Party.

In many other States, too, the Congress was facing a serious threat from rival parties. In some cases, as in West Bengal and Kerala, the threat is from the Communists; in others, Orissa and Rajasthan for example, the threat is from parties of the Right.

One of the reasons for the drift of part of the electorate away from the Congress Party, Kamaraj felt, was inadequate communication between the party leadership and the people. The promotion of economic development and the provision of social services like health and education by the State entails additional taxation, which is nowhere popular. Kamaraj felt that Congress Party leaders were failing to educate public opinion on the country's problems and the efforts needed to meet them: "Whatever we do, we must tell the public why we are doing it. The people must always be taken into confidence. Once they understand the reasons behind certain policies, they will come forward to help. The trouble is that we only go to the people to tell them how much we have done, but seldom to tell them the difficulties we face and the facts of certain situations that exist." The release of prominent leaders of the party from executive posts was intended to bridge this communication gap.

The rot within the Congress Party, in the form of dissension and indiscipline, was at least as serious as the threat from rival parties. There was constant wrangling in almost every State—Madras was an exception—between the 'ins' (members of the Government and their supporters) and the 'outs' (the office-bearers of the party organisation). There have been instances in which the dissidents have worked against the official Congress Party candidate in an election if he or she happened to belong to the ministerialist ('in') group, and vice versa. The Kamaraj Plan was designed to stem this internal rot too. Prominent party leaders occupying governmental office would vacate their seats to make way for others who had been chafing for a share in executive power.

The Kamaraj Plan was approved by the Congress Working Committee early in August 1963, with Nehru as its princi-

pal and enthusiastic exponent. It was implemented within two months: six members of the Union Cabinet and Chief Ministers of six States resigned office—though with varying degrees of conviction and cheerfulness—to strengthen the party organisation.

VI. Congress Socialism

What impelled Kamaraj to initiate the plan of office resignation and party revitalisation which has been named after him? Was it a refusal to accept the logic of democracy, in which no single political party can hope to remain in power for ever? By the time of the Kamaraj Plan, the Congress Party had ruled at the Centre and in every State except Kerala—where the Communist Party was in power for a brief spell—for an unbroken period of 16 years since independence.

Kamaraj's motive can be understood only in the context of the problems faced and the progress made by India since independence, and the aims of the country's major political parties.

Before independence, the Congress and the Muslim League had been the two major political parties in undivided India. The separatist, communal philosophy of the Muslim League led to the partition of the sub-continent simultaneously with independence in August 1947. The Congress, a secular political party whose membership has always been multi-religious, had for decades linked economic development and social reform with the fight for freedom. On coming to power in free India, its aims were to remove social inequality, to secure rapid economic development, and to narrow the immense gap which existed between the rich few and the mass of people sunk in poverty.

The removal of social disabilities was speedily accomplished. The new Constitution, which came into force in January 1950, ended all disabilities based on caste. It specifically abolished untouchability in all its forms, and the practice of untouchability has been made a punishable offence. The Constitution not only introduced universal adult suffrage;

in order to ensure that money and traditional social dominance did not interfere with the free choice of the formerly 'low' and exploited castes, it reserved a percentage of seats in the national parliament and in the State legislatures for the scheduled castes (the former untouchables) and for the neglected aboriginal hill tribes, in proportion to their population strength. In addition they may also stand for election from the unreserved constituencies, and have often done so with success. The Constitution also reserves a similar percentage for the scheduled castes and the hill tribes in recruitment to public services.

The age-long disabilities of women, "the submerged half of Indian humanity" as Mahatma Gandhi had called them, were also removed. Parliament enacted a series of laws which enforce monogamy on the Hindu male, permit divorce on specified grounds, and give women a share in inheritance.

The Congress Party's economic objectives, however, could not be realised simply through legislation. The reduction of economic disparties depended mainly on the growth of the economy, since the Congress Party's approach was to raise the level of the poor rather than to universalise poverty by expropriating the rich. Having missed the industrial revolution during two centuries of subjection to British rule, and having opted for democracy on becoming free, India could not force the pace of economic development beyond certain limits.

However, substantial economic growth has been achieved, and some idea of it may be had from these indicators: agricultural production has gone up by 62 per cent (rice production rose from 23.5 million tons in the agricultural year 1949-50 to 38.7 million tons in 1964-65, and wheat production from 6.4 million tonnes to 12.1 million tonnes: but imports have continued to be necessary because of the rise in population meanwhile by 100 million—hence the present vigorous drive for family planning and for further improvement of agricultural productivity). Industrial production has gone up by about 150 per cent since independence; national income

at constant prices is up by 69 per cent, and income per capita by 27 per cent (the rise in population accounting for the difference); production of steel ingots has increased from 1.4 million tonnes to 6.1 million tonnes per year; installed power capacity has risen from 2.3 million kW to 10.1 million kW; the railways now haul 204 million tonnes of freight per year against 93 million tonnes fifteen years ago. These advances have been achieved jointly by private enterprise and the public sector, under the Five Year Plans of development which are drawn up by an advisory Planning Commission and debated in Parliament before adoption.

Alongside this process of economic development, Parliament and the State legislatures enacted a number of laws for reducing economic disparities and providing social security to the vulnerable, formerly exploited sections of the population. Among these are the laws for abolition of zamindaris, the feudal rent-collecting intermediaries between the State and the peasant; the conferment of security of tenure on the tenant cultivator; the imposition of maximum limits on the share of produce that the landowner could claim as rent from the tenant cultivator; the fixation of minimum wages for agricultural and industrial labour; and the enforcement of provident fund and health insurance schemes for industrial workers, with employer and employee contributions.

These measures, together with the spread of education and the eradication of malaria and other epidemic diseases, have greatly mitigated the condition of India's poor. The expectation of life at birth has risen to 50 years, from 32 in the decade ending 1950.

The Congress Party wants to proceed further and faster along these lines. In 1955, at a plenary session of the party at Avadi, near Madras, the party formally adopted the aim of working for a 'socialistic pattern of society'.

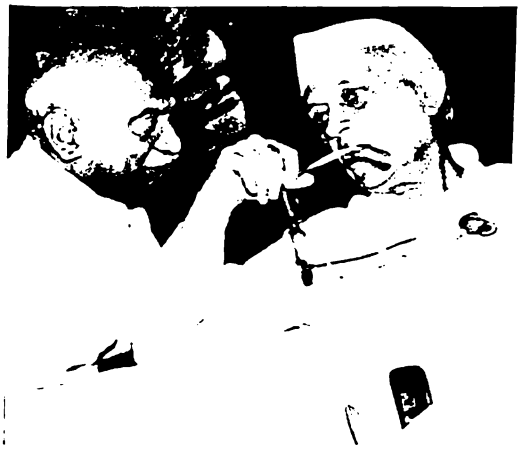
The Congress has been a composite, multi-class party backed by economic interests ranging from industrial entrepreneurs and traders to industrial workers and small peasants.

Even after Avadi, and after the formation of the conservative Swatantra Party in 1959, many industrial houses have continued to support the Congress Party, though less enthusiastically than before.

Kamaraj's approach to socialism, like that of Nehru and the succeeding Prime Ministers, is not based on Marxism and class conflict, but is a Gandhian, multi-class approach.

Kamaraj once defined socialism in these words: "Those who are backward should progress. What is essential for a man's living should be provided: dwelling, job, food and education. That is socialism." On another occasion he said: "The people are not concerned about your theories. They want jobs, wages, homes, roads, schools and hospitals. If we aim at giving these to them, we have all the ideology we want." He says about the half-dozen small socialist opposition parties: "They talk about socialism. We in the Congress will implement it."

A mixed economy in which the private sector will grow along with the public sector, though the latter will become increasingly more important, is basic to the Congress concept of democratic socialism. It does not envisage Soviet-style wholesale nationalisation. Kamaraj is against monopolies and an excessive concentration of wealth; but, unlike the dogmatists of the Left (and there are some within the Congress Party) he is not for imposing needless constraints on private enterprise. "There is plenty of room for the private sector to grow", he said in his address to the 1965 plenary session of the party at Durgapur. The next year, at the Jaipur plenary session, he suggested a liberalisation of controls: "With a view to increasing the tempo of production in the country, it appears to me that licensing (of new industrial units) may be dispensed with in respect of industries which do not require any foreign exchange either for machinery and equipment or for raw materials. This will encourage entrepreneurs to design and fabricate capital goods in our own country and utilise local materials for manufacture. The objective of improving indigenous technology and achieving



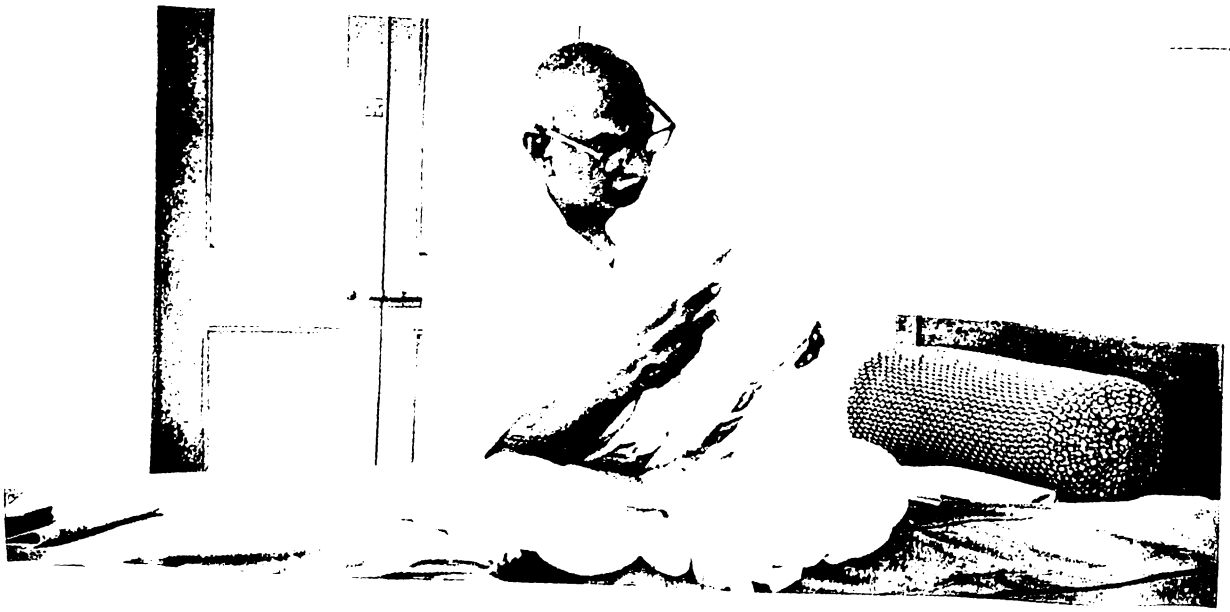
With the Prime Ministers of free India : Jawaharlal Nehru

Lal Bahadur Shastri

Mrs. Indira Gandhi

With U.S. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey and Ambassador Chester Bowles

At his simple meal, using the fingers in traditional Indian fashion. Below: *A lone moment*



import substitution will receive an impetus by such liberalisation of the policy of licensing."

The pragmatism of Kamaraj is evidenced again by the warning he sounded in January 1965 against over-ambitious targets for the Fourth Five Year Plan: "Impatient as we are to eliminate the poverty, misery, unemployment and ignorance that surround us, and anxious as we are to transform ourselves into a modern society in the shortest possible time, we may be eager to embark on larger and larger plans. But prudence should guide our actions and should help us to assess realistically whether the intended benefits could be secured as envisaged. Any inflationary pressure arising out of large investment would again have its severe impact on the poor and the weaker sections of society." The devaluation of the rupee in June 1966 became necessary because the warning sounded by Kamaraj and others against inflationary public spending was not heeded.

Kamaraj hopes ardently that India will prove, through pragmatic but vigorous action to improve the lot of the common man, that socialism can be achieved without class conflict and without the suppression of individual freedom. He told the Congress Party's plenary session at Bhubaneswar in 1964: "In the days when Gandhiji led the movement for freedom, many thought that it was not possible to achieve freedom without violence. But freedom was in fact achieved without violence and bloodshed. Similarly there are others who think that socialism cannot be achieved without authoritarianism. We hope we shall be able to establish a socialist society without class conflict, and dispel the popular belief that in a socialist state men lose their natural freedom."

As Kamaraj sees it, the Congress is the only party which can build democratic socialism in India. The conservative Swatantra and Jana Sangh parties have no use for socialism. The two Communist parties, one Moscow-leaning and the other Peking-leaning, have no use for democracy. The non-communist parties of the Left profess to stand for democratic socialism, but they are hopelessly splintered. Other political

parties in India are confined to particular States and regions, and have no coherent political philosophy of nation-wide relevance.

It is this conviction that there is no alternative in sight to the Congress Party for achieving democratic socialism which impelled Kamaraj to appeal to the non-communist parties of the Left—almost all of whose leaders were originally in the Congress—to rejoin the parent organisation and strengthen it for quickening the country's progress. It is a measure of the strength of this logic that Asoka Mehta, former chairman of the Praja Socialist Party, and some of his followers have rejoined the Congress Party in recent years. But this has hardly offset the growing challenge to the Congress from rival parties of the Right and the Left. Hence the 'Kamaraj Plan'.

VII. As Congress President

KAMARAJ, one of the six Chief Ministers who gave up executive power, laid down office on October 2, 1963, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. He instantly started on a tour of the Madras districts, to "look at the Congress through the eyes of the people".

It was far from his thoughts to assume the presidentship of the Congress Party. When he was asked about the possibility, he said that his purpose in relinquishing Chief Ministership would be defeated if he should take up that office. However, Kamaraj was drafted for party presidentship within a week. The Congress Working Committee decided on October 9 that he should take over the nation-wide leadership of the party and not merely apply himself to revitalising it in his home State.

In the new and larger national role, Kamaraj had to content himself with devoting ten days in the month to Madras, dividing the rest of the time equally between Delhi where the Congress Party has its headquarters, and tours in the rest of the country.

Public rallies continue to be the most important medium of mass communication for political parties in India: not the Press (literacy is still confined to 30 per cent of the population, though this is a great improvement on the literacy level of 14.6 per cent at the time of independence), not the Radio (there are less than five million receiving sets in the country), nor Television (which does not exist outside Delhi). India's national leaders have therefore to be constantly on the move in order to talk to the people and explain to them their aims and policies.

As Congress Party chairman, Kamaraj has become a figure as familiar to the Punjabi and the Bengali, the Maharashtrian and the Bihari, as he is to the people of South India.

He travels through the length and breadth of the country, even in the cold winter of the northern plains, in the same simple but distinctive dress he has always used: a long shirt, with wide three-quarter-length sleeves, reaching to the knees over the dhoti, and a folded wrap thrown over the left shoulder. A rare occasion when he dressed differently was when he visited the Indo-Pakistan border in Punjab during the hostilities of September 1965, when he put on a khaki uniform.

During these hostilities, as earlier during the Chinese Communist aggression against India in October 1962, Kamaraj toured the country collecting donations in cash and gold for the National Defence Fund.

Communist China was one of the few countries of the world to back Pakistan in 1965 in the three-week war which began with Pakistan's attack on Kashmir. Peking served an ultimatum on India when the fighting was at its peak. The central theme of Kamaraj's speeches during those trying days was that the conflict between China and Pakistan, on the one hand, and India on the other, would decide whether totalitarianism and communalism would win or whether democracy would win.

Though Kamaraj can now follow English and Hindi quite well, he makes public speeches only in Tamil. Language, however, has not been a barrier between him and the people in any part of India. Vast crowds gather to see him and hear the translation of his Tamil speeches. Kamaraj's own explanation of this is revealing.

It was in response to a journalist's question whether he found it a handicap that he does not speak either of India's two link languages. "Why," Kamaraj asked, "don't you think honesty is a language, that character also speaks? Is it not true that these languages are comprehensible even to an illi-

terate? When I went to Punjab, hundreds of thousands turned up. Why?"

To another who asked him how it had been possible for a man like him from an obscure lower middle-class home in a backward area of the country to rise to national eminence, he replied: "When you want to do something and you are determined to do it, and it is a good thing, and you set about it in a way that no one is offended, and get a few friends like yourself with whom you join in a common task on equal terms —well, who can object? There you are, you want your friends and they want you—and then it is a question of who is more often right than wrong."

On the laying down of public office under the Kamaraj Plan, with the consequent loss of executive power and patronage, chauffeur-driven cars and well-appointed official residences, he said he could only speak for himself: "To me, power means only opportunity, which also means the responsibility, to serve. If you look at power that way, it is not something over which one should rejoice on winning it or regret on losing it. We have a job to do. Let us do it."

On the controversy over Hindi, now the official language of the Indian Union with English as associate official language, Kamaraj counsels the Hindi-speaking people not to push the pace of change-over to Hindi. The Supreme Court still conducts its business entirely in English, and Parliament largely so. The competitive examinations for recruitment to the all-India and Central civil services are conducted in English. Business correspondence between different parts of India is in English. It is still the effective link language of the Indian intelligentsia.

Kamaraj urges non-Hindi speakers, on the other hand, to recognise that no country can for ever be linked by a foreign language. He urges them to learn Hindi, which is spoken by more than a third of the population and understood by many more. He said to a Madras audience: "Because we have differences with a sister language, should we plump for a for-

eign language?" He counters the DMK's charge of Hindi 'domination' by pointing out that the Central Government is committed to Nehru's pledge to continue English as an additional official language of the Union, along with Hindi, until as long as the non-Hindi speakers desire it.

In his tight schedule of country-wide travel and daily work, Kamaraj permits himself one indulgence: a nap in the afternoon. He often works late into the night, and rises early, but must have the siesta. He smokes, does not drink, and likes chicken done in the North Indian tandoori fashion.

The abstention from alcohol is in accordance with the Congress Party's commitment to Prohibition. The party's commitment, which was originally at the insistence of Mahatma Gandhi, is half hearted; there are several States in which Prohibition is partial or non-existent. Madras is among the few States which are totally 'dry'. Kamaraj wants it to stay that way, not because he is puritanical—he has no intolerance of individuals who drink—but because he has seen that the village poor and the urban industrial workers of Tamilnad are much better off with the closure of toddy shops. The money saved on liquor is now spent on better food, more clothing and children's education. Moreover, illicit distillation and smuggling are much less prevalent in Madras than in other 'dry' States, so that Prohibition is not the mockery that it has tended to become elsewhere.

Kamaraj is a good listener. As Chief Minister of Madras and now as Congress Party chairman, he has been meeting and talking to economists, journalists, engineers, professors and a variety of other intellectuals. He encourages them to talk freely and listens to them with interest, interjecting a searching question now and then, and applies to their proposals one test: the greatest good of the greatest number.

VIII. Views on World Affairs

THE MIND and heart of Kamaraj are engrossed by one concern, the improvement of the living conditions of the common people of India, and he seldom speaks about world affairs unless, as in the case of relations with Communist China and Pakistan, they impinge directly on the freedom and territorial integrity of India. But he is well aware that no country is an island unto itself, and that India has a vital stake in peace in order to be able to devote all her resources and attention to economic development.

He fully shares Nehru's approach to foreign policy, which the successive Indian Governments have adhered to, namely that India should promote world peace by keeping aloof from military alliances and pursuing an independent foreign policy aimed at the elimination of colonialism in all forms and of racial discrimination, and a narrowing of the gap between the developed and the developing countries.

The following extracts from his address at the plenary session of the Congress Party at Bhubaneswar, in January 1964, throw light on Kamaraj's approach to contemporary world affairs :

"The world has suffered a serious blow and humanity lost a genuine friend in the brutal assassination of President John F. Kennedy a few weeks ago. Mr. Kennedy was not merely the President of the United States but was one of the great leaders of world peace. By his bold and imaginative approach to the nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union, he has laid the foundation for international peace and taken the first step towards world disarmament.

"Mr. Kennedy had the vision to see beyond national

pride into a world rid of the scourge of war and a humanity living in peace and brotherhood. His firm and liberal approach to the difficult problem of the integration of the Negro population with the Whites had earned the respect and admiration of all liberal-minded people of the world, and by paying with his life the price for establishing human equality and dignity, he has joined the eminent ranks of martyrs like Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln. Only mortals die, but martyrs live on for eternity, for in their death the cause for which they laid down their lives derives greater strength and support. We offer our deepest sympathies to the people of the United States.

"I do not wish to dilate on the sad story of the Chinese aggression on our soil. The world has seldom seen greater ingratitude than what China has shown to a friendly country, which had helped, co-operated with and supported it all along. The courage and valour displayed by our jawans under the most difficult conditions of weather and terrain against the surprise attack by the Chinese will ever be remembered and honoured by our people. To those who gave their lives in the defence of our motherland we bow our head in reverence.

"The magnificent response which our country gave to the defence effort and the spirit of sacrifice displayed by all the people in organising defence against aggression have been a source of deep satisfaction and encouragement to us. We also received generous offers of help and assistance from many friendly countries, though they themselves were in different camps. We are grateful to all those countries.

"While we must continue to mobilise our resources to build up our defence, we shall at the same time keep the door of negotiation open for finding a just and honourable solution. The nation has already demonstrated that it will not tolerate aggression or surrender any part of our territory. Negotiation based on the Colombo proposals, which imply the vacation of aggression as a condition precedent to mutual discussion, is the only basis that the country can accept.

"It is unfortunate that our neighbour Pakistan has thought fit to indulge in the game of fishing in troubled waters. Its recent conduct in concluding a border agreement with China in respect of territory to which it has no title whatsoever, and its further collaboration with China, apart from raising the question of the consistency of its membership in the Central Treaty Organisation, shows that opportunism, not conviction or principle, guides its actions.

"There is nothing we desire more than to live in peace and harmony with the people of Pakistan who, until partition, were our fellow-citizens and shared their joys and sorrows with us. It is in that spirit that we reopened direct discussions with Pakistan recently and conducted a series of talks at ministerial level. But Pakistan's obduracy made these negotiations meaningless and they had to be discontinued. I do hope that the hand of friendship which we have extended to them will not continue to be spurned by any short-sighted move aimed at temporary advantages.

"Thanks to the efforts of the two great leaders, President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, there is today a lessening of world tension. But the great powers of the world have been arming themselves to the teeth with weapons of mass destruction. This mad race, if not halted in time, must inevitably lead sooner or later to a conflagration which, unlike the previous world wars that left behind victors and vanquished, will exterminate all humanity.

"There can be no hope of peace unless genuine disarmament takes place throughout the world and an international treaty ensuring complete disarmament is signed by all the nations of the world.

"The Chinese aggression has put to test our policy of non-alignment and from that ordeal our policy has emerged as a sound and practical one. Critics have charged that the policy of non-alignment has failed and that we should align ourselves with one of the power blocs. Non-alignment is no insurance against aggression, even as treaties, covenants

and pacts have not prevented aggression in the past. History is full of instances of members of pacts committing aggression on one another and of other nations committing aggression on the members of a group bound by treaties and pacts.

"That China stands today isolated even from the group of Communist countries is clear evidence that non-alignment has gained wider acceptance as a stabilising policy in a world torn by ideologies and other differences. The Congress adheres and subscribes fully to this policy of non-alignment.

"The world is passing through a silent revolution. People subject to colonial domination are throwing off their shackles and asserting their right to freedom and independence. In the United Nations and outside we have suported the right of people to national sovereignty and independence. We have the satisfaction of seeing more and more Asian and African peoples emerging into independent status.

"We have condemned in no uncertain terms the denial of human rights to the coloured people in South Africa and Portuguese East Africa. This is only a projection of our national policy at home of ensuring equal civic, social, political and legal rights to every section of our people."

IX. Role in post-Nehru India

JAWAHARLAL Nehru combined the office of Prime Minister with Congress Party presidentship during a considerable part of the period after freedom. When someone else was Congress President, the office had far less significance than in the years before independence. It was like the moon reflecting the effulgence of Nehru's solar light.

Would it be the same with Kamaraj as Congress President?

The course of events did not permit the question to be put to the test. At the plenary session of the party at Bhubaneswar, early in January 1964, where Kamaraj was formally installed as party chairman, Nehru—he was 74—suffered the first of the strokes that were to claim his life within a few months. It was the first Congress session after independence at which Nehru did not dominate the proceedings; he could not even participate.

When Nehru died the world wondered, as indeed it had done for some years earlier, "After Nehru, what?"

Nehru's charisma was profound, and the people of India united under his leadership to a degree unprecedented in the country's history as a free nation. Would India with its latent linguistic, regional and communal conflicts hold together without Nehru? Would democracy survive?

Those who entertained these fears (and the fears were not confined to foreigners) did not realise that Nehru had fully succeeded in one of the greatest endeavours in human history, the shaping and education of the world's second largest nation,

which had been steeped in poverty and illiteracy under foreign subjection for 200 years, into a virile and active 20th-century democracy.

When Nehru died, India had become a composite nation of about 439 million people (1961 census) including 366 million Hindus, 47 million Muslims, 11 million Christians, eight million Sikhs, three million Buddhists, two million Jains and smaller numbers of Parsees, Jews and others—all enjoying equal rights in a secular State unidentified with any religion. It was a multilingual nation, each of the twelve major languages with a rich literary heritage and spoken by populations as large as those of individual European countries. It was a society in which every citizen had not merely a legal but effective right to vote. It was a society in which women enjoyed equal rights with men: as many as 48 million women exercised their franchise in the 1962 elections, which returned 164 women legislators to the State Assemblies and 35 to the directly elected House of Parliament. In the infant democracy of India could be seen and sensed every one of the signs of a free society, in a measure not less than in the oldest of the world's democracies: freedom of the vote, freedom of political association, freedom of faith, freedom of expression, freedom to choose a vocation of one's choice, judicial supremacy, and equality of opportunity subject only to the limitation of economic circumstance—a limitation which is steadily being removed with the development of the economy and the growth of educational and employment opportunities.

India did not break apart and go to pieces when Nehru died, because nationhood had become a fact and the democratic process a reality. The question was not "After Nehru, what?", but "After Nehru, who?"

Kamaraj played a leading role in providing the answer. Meeting within a few days of Nehru's death, the Congress Working Committee authorised Kamaraj to ascertain the consensus of opinion on the choice of the next Prime Minister and to advise the Congress Parliamentary Party—which elects the Prime Minister—accordingly.

The man in whose favour Kamaraj mobilised the consensus, and who was unanimously elected by the Congress Parliamentary Party, was Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Kamaraj told the Congress members of Parliament: "It is impossible to fill the role of the great leader, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Nobody can discharge that responsibility individually. It is by collective responsibility, collective leadership and collective approach that we will have to undertake this very difficult task. It is because of this that in the last two days we approached all the members of the Working Committee, all the members of the executive committee of the Parliamentary Party, and almost all the members, to bring about this atmosphere. I must express my grateful thanks to everyone for having contributed to bring about this unanimous decision with regard to leadership."

Lal Bahadur, like Kamaraj, was of humble origin. Son of a school teacher and orphaned at a tender age, he knew what poverty meant and understood the people's wants and sufferings. While still in his teens he responded to the call of Mahatma Gandhi and plunged into the freedom movement. In 1951, in a move rather similar to the Kamaraj Plan, he gave up his Ministership in the Uttar Pradesh Government to become general secretary of the Congress Party and in that capacity played an important role in organising the party's election campaign in 1952. Lal Bahadur was among the members of the Central Cabinet who resigned under the Kamaraj Plan, but he was soon called back to become Minister without Portfolio following Nehru's illness early in 1964.

Death came to Lal Bahadur within 20 months of his prime ministership, away from the land he had served and led. It came at the end of a mission which brought the hope of peace to the 600 million people of India and Pakistan. Before signing the joint declaration with President Ayub Khan of Pakistan at Tashkent, Lal Bahadur spoke on telephone to Kamaraj, who gave his full support for the statesmanlike act. Little did either know that tragedy was to strike within a few hours.

Kamaraj again tried to bring about a unanimous election of the next Prime Minister. He sought to achieve a consensus in favour of Nehru's daughter, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who had joined the Lal Bahadur Cabinet in 1964 as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. Though the effort failed, it was the candidate backed by Kamaraj whom the Congress Parliamentary Party elected as leader, by 355 votes against 169 cast in favour of her rival, Mr. Morarji Desai.

Indira Gandhi and Kamaraj were no strangers. They had worked together in the Congress Working Committee for many years. Mrs. Gandhi, as the then president of the Congress Party, visited Communist-ruled Kerala in 1959 and recommended the sacking of the Communist government since it was trying to take over the school system and subvert democracy. She was the first Central Minister from outside the South to visit Madras when the State was rocked by an anti-Hindi agitation early in 1965. It required courage for a Hindi-speaking northerner to face the sullen audiences in the Madras districts and to convince them that the new status of Hindi (it became the official language of the Union in January 1965, as stipulated in the Constitution) did not mean the suppression of the other languages of India or the discontinuance of English as an all-India link language. She succeeded in helping to calm the atmosphere. The qualities of courage and the quest for conciliation which Mrs Gandhi displayed during that visit to Madras State have also been the distinguishing features of her record as Prime Minister.

She assumed office at a difficult moment in the country's affairs. The implementation of the Tashkent Declaration was a challenge to statesmanship. Internally, with a stagnant agriculture aggravated by the 1965 drought, food shortage causing unrest in some parts of the country, and industrial production hampered by the shortage of foreign exchange, the tasks of political and economic management have been stupendous. Mrs. Gandhi has been vigorously grappling with these problems.

The partnership between the fair, aristocratic, for-

eign-educated Mrs. Gandhi, a Kashmiri, and the rough-hewn, swarthy man with barely six years' schooling from the deep south, is a token of India's national unity, democracy and stability.

Whether or not Mrs. Gandhi continues as Prime Minister after the 1967 elections, and whatever new role Kamaraj might play after he ceases to be chairman of the Congress Party, it may be predicted with confidence that India will continue to function by democratic process. Unlike Indonesia, Ghana, and many other newly free countries of Asia and Africa where democracy failed to strike root, India and its people, heirs to two millennia and more of civilisation, have found in democracy their true and natural means of self-expression.

Kamaraj is a symbol of the new, resurgent India, the world's largest democracy. A hundred and nineteen million men and women cast their votes in the elections to India's Parliament in 1962—55 per cent of the 216 million who were eligible to vote. Most of them live in the villages, which are the heart of India. And the heart of India's democratic leadership is close to the villages.

Kamaraj was recently asked by a newspaperman about reports that he might become the next Prime Minister, after the general elections in 1967. Did he have any....?

Before the reporter could complete his sentence, Kamaraj called for the next question.

The interviewer pressed on: "There is no running away from the fact that you will have to play a leading role in the nation's affairs in the coming decade."

"Yes," Kamaraj said, "in the village affairs of the nation. That is where real India is."