CHAPTER FIVE

N.T.RAMA RAO - LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS -
PARTY LEADER AND ADMINISTRATOR
Nimmakuru is a small village by the linden canal, known as Nagole in the Budivada taluk of Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh. It is 24 km from Budivada, the mandal town, and 40 km from Vizianagaram, the second most important city in Andhra Pradesh. Its population is 1500. But 60 years ago, barely 500 people inhabited the hamlet.

Nandamuri Harala Rama Rao was born in Nimmakuru village on May 23, 1923, the village who had 80 acres of land.

Tarak Rama Rao was the first boy born in the family and everybody doted on him particularly Ramaiah and Chandamama (N.R. Rama Rao’s uncle and aunt). Since they had no children of their own, they decided to adopt the boy. Recalls Rama Rao, “Of course no legal documents were signed, it was just an understanding. But my adopted parents gave me all their love and affection.”

When the boy was two years old, there was a festival in the village in honour of Kali, the demon killer goddess. A tribal happened to visit the village, going from house to house forecasting people’s future. He happened to see the boy in the street. He looked at the child intently for a moment and then commented, “He will be a film personality.”

2. Ibid., p.55.
minute or so and announced: This little fellow has a bright future. Some day he is going to rule this land.

The child's education began at age five. There was no school as such in the village. A teacher used to come to Nimmakuru from a village five km away, Nidumolu, to conduct classes for the village boys in a makeshift shed. Valluru Subba Rao, the teacher of N.T.Rama Rao, who was highly respected man in the area. He taught the Nandamuri family for two generations, including Rama Rao's parents.

"The knowledge of Telugu that I possess today," says 3 Rama Rao "goes to the credit of my teachers and the way of education in those days." Subba Rao used to walk down to Nimmakuru from his village every morning. It was a one-teacher school. Apart from teaching the alphabet to the children of the village, he used to help the villagers by writing for them promissory notes, letters and other things.

Growing up in the village was fun. Because of the canal nearby, there was always a lot of greenery around, lots of trees to climb and fruit to eat. Whenever it rained, Ramalah made sure his adopted son did not miss the

5. Ibid., p.55.
school. He would carry the boy to school on his shoulders, wash his feet and dry them with his ANGAVASTRA, the long piece of cloth the Andhras always keep across their shoulders and deposit him in the school.

By the time Subba Rao taught all he could, Rama Rao was 10 and read upto fifth class. That was all there was in the village so far as education was concerned. People in the village thought that, being the first son, he would start helping his father in his agricultural activities.

But Ramaiah had other plans. He wanted Rama Rao to continue with his studies. He reasoned: "This is the first boy in our family. He must bring a good name to our family. Never mind what happens, he must get a good education and take up a big job, a real big one."

LIFE IN VIJAYAWADA

In 1933, Ramaiah and his wife took their adopted son to Vijayawada, admitted him to sixth class in the (now Gandhi) Municipal School and set up home in the famous town by the Krishna River. Dressed in Khaki shirts and half-

deemed shirt, Rama Rao used to go to school.

In 1940 Rama Rao passed his matriculation examination. He joined the SRR College in Vijayawada to study for Intermediate. Soon after, Ramiah and his wife became old and infirm and went back to the village. It was now the turn of Laxmaiah and Venkataramamma to come down to Vijayawada to see their son through college.

Until then, Rama Rao did not show any particular interest in dramatics. His handwriting was good; his friends would often get him to write their names on their books. He used to paint off and on. He even won a prize for one of his paintings at a state-level competition during 1941-42.

At the SRR College, Vishwanatha Satyanarayana, the well-known Telugu writer, was head of the Telugu Department. Besides being a talented and famous literature, he was an excellent teacher of Telugu literature and was very popular among his students. At the end of Rama Rao’s first year in college the students decided to stage a play written by Vishwanatha during the college anniversary celebrations.

The play Rachamalluni Dauryam — The Truce of Rachamallu — had a strong heroine's role called Nagamma. Soon a hunt began for the young man who could play the role; girls took no part in stage activities in those days. Rama Rao was already a handsome young man and Vishwanatha Srijanarayana's eyes fell on him. He went for Rama Rao one day and said with an air of finality, you shall play the heroine's role in my play: Rama Rao was dumbstruck. He never took part in a play in his life, let alone play a woman's role. "I was not prepared to play a woman's role, reminiscences Rama Rao, "but the old man adamant. I agreed reluctantly for the simple reason that I did not have the heart to upset a great man like him."

In May 1942, at the age of 20, Rama Rao married Basavarama Taraka, daughter of his mother's brother. "I got married and failed in my inter examination, not once but twice" says Rama Rao. "My friends used to tease me, saying VIVAHAM VIDYA NASHANAM — the fellow got married and failed in his examinations."

During the two years he did odd jobs, like wholesale

6.Ibid., p.10,
tobacco business, to supplement the family income. Meanwhile, my friends hacking became too much to bear. I was angry and I became serious. I was determined to pass my examination. He worked day and night and eventually passed the Intermediate examination with marks that were good enough to fetch him admission to the Andhra Christian College in Guntur for a Bachelor of Arts course in 1945.

Encouraged by the response he got for his performance on the college stage, Rama Rao began to take to the stage as a serious hobby. With help from friends, he formed an amateur drama group called the National Art Theatre. Whenever someone wanted some money for a good cause, they would stage a play and raise the money by charging one rupee per ticket. 'Sometimes,' recalls Trivikrama Rao, Rama Rao's younger brother who produced several films under the National Art Theatre banner later, we staged plays to raise money to help people perform their daughters' weddings.'

It was at the Andhra Christian College that Rama Rao met K. Jaggaiah who later became a noted Telugu actor. Both took active part in staging plays in the college till they passed out in 1947. In 1946, at the annual conference of
Andhra Nataka Kala Parishad held in Vijayawada, Rama Rao, Jaggaiah and Mallikamba, a radio artist, staged a play called CHESINA PAPAM, The Committed Sin, written by the late Kopparapu Subba Rao and bagged the first prize for the best play.

Rama Rao, Jaggaiah and their friends continued their dramatic activities in Vijayawada after they finished college. After leaving college, Jaggaiah took a teacher's job in a school in Duggirala, his native place. Every evening, he used to go to Vijayawada, nearly 20 km away, by train to work for the amateur drama group, National Art Theatre, and return to his village the next morning.

The first offer to join films came Rama Rao's way while he was still in college. C. Pullaiah, the famous Telugu film director, heard about Rama Rao's acting abilities through a friend who happened to see him on the stage in a couple of plays and came down from Madras with offer of a role in KEELU DURRAM (The Magic Horse), the film he was planning to make shortly.

Rama Rao recollects the incident thus: "I told the late Pullaiah that my father came to Vijayawada to see me through college I didn't want to disturb my studies and
join films at that point of time because I was keen on getting my degree. Pullaiah wasn't the one who would give up easily. He then went to my father. My father said to him, "I leave it to my son's decision." Pullaiah came back to me to report what my father had told him. I then said to him: "Sir, I am more determined now than ever to pursue my studies. If my father has put the burden of the decision on me, I must at least make him feel happy that I am behaviour as a responsible man. Let me get my degree first. Once I finish my studies, I can come down to Madras to try my luck in films. But most certainly not now."

L.V. Prasad, who has already established himself as a director in the Telugu film industry, happened to be in Vijayawada that night. Prasad was on a talent-scouting mission of Andhra. He was in search of new faces to introduce in a film called SRIMATI, he was planning to direct for Sarithi Studios.

A well wisher caught hold of Rama Rao around 11:00 pm in the night and took him to Prasad. Prasad, who was busy watching a film in a hall, had a good look at him. Recalls

Rama Rao: "He asked for my photographs. I said I didn't have any. He then asked me to go to Madras for a screen test the following month. I said I can come but you must bear my travelling, boarding and lodging expenses. After going to Madras, he sent me the money. Then I went to Madras on May 21, 1947.

L.V.Prasad gave him his first cine test at the Shobhanachala (now Venus) Studio on May 21, 1947. The test lasted an hour and a half on the sets of DURHI, a film then under production. The test was very tough. Prasad told Rama Rao to go back, the result would be communicated later. The young man was not sure how he fared in the test. Uncertain of what was in store for him, he boarded the Calcutta Mail to return to Vijayawada where he now had a wife and a little son.

He kept trying for all kinds of jobs. He applied for a sub-inspector's job but failed to get it. Later he applied for a job as a King's Commissioned Officer (KCD) and was one of the two selected from the state. He was asked to proceed to Dehradun for an interview. But his father was not enthusiastic about his son joining the
military service because nobody in the family went to the military so far. Rama Rao didn’t go for the interview.

Meanwhile, a letter arrived from Prasad. The film for which Rama Rao was tested was being put off for the time being, said the letter, but the director was making another film called MANA DESAM (our Country). There was a small but crucial role in it. The role would be his, if he wished. He was welcome to go to Madras if he wanted to do the role. This came as a disappointment.

Rama Rao now sat for the Madras Service Commission examination for a sub-registrar’s job. Out of the 1100 candidates who took the test, seven were selected. Rama Rao was one of them. He was pleased that at least now he could earn his living. Everybody he knew said it was a good job. He took up the job in Guntur. The salary was Rs.120 per month. With allowances, the total worked out to Rs.190. In October 1947 barely two months after Independence, this wasn’t exactly a princely sum. But for a man who badly needed a job to support his parents, wife and child it wasn’t something to be scoffed at.
A SUB-REGISTRAR FOR THREE WEEKS

With the lunch box in hand and much relief and excitement in his heart, Rama Rao arrived in the Registrar's office on the morning of the first day. Like the others, he took off his coat, hung it to the chair and got down to work with all the enthusiasm at his command.

Come lunch time and the oldest peon in the office brought him coffee and snacks. Having neither asked for it nor paid for it, Rama Rao was puzzled. He showed the peon his own lunch box and asked, why have you brought all this for me?

The old man gave him a mysterious smile and said, "My young master, this is a practice in this office. I arrange for coffee and snacks for all the people working here. Now you are one of us. That's why I've brought these for you too."

The mystery stayed unsolved, but only until that evening. In the registrar's office, the employees used to hang their coats to the chairs the moment they arrived in the office. The senior most peon was apparently in charge of what went on in the office. Even before a customer's

documents reached a sub-registrar, the bargain would have been struck about the 'price'. Once the papers were signed, the peon would pick them up and go out with the customer, collect the bribe behind a wall.

From bribes thus collected all day, he would arrange for snacks and coffee for all. He would then distribute what was left among the employees, in keeping with their status. The district registrar got the biggest chunk followed by the joint registrar, sub-registrar, head clerk, clerks and then the peons, in that order. The head peon would work it all out neatly and put each one's share in the pocket of his coat.

At the end of the day, every one would quietly pick up his coat and leave, as though they were oblivious of what had transpired. When Rama Rao picked up his coat, he discovered to his amazement that one of his pockets contained hundred-odd rupees which did not belong to him. He flew into a rage. They were surprised to see a man who was refusing to accept what came to be known as 'collection money'.

Soon after, a letter arrived from Madras, this time from a young, Calcutta-trained film enthusiast called
B.A. Subba Rao. Subba Rao got an opportunity to direct a film called PALLETURI PILLA (Village Girl) his first venture. The eager director was looking around for a 'hero' man' to play the lead in the film. He happened to see Rama Rao's photograph in L.V. Prasad's album and was impressed by his looks. The letter said he would like to consider giving Rama Rao the hero's role. Could helpless come down to Madras at the earliest? Of course, all the expenses would be paid for. The letter was accompanied by a note from L.V. Prasad: Good chance, take it.

This came at a time when Rama Rao's morale had hit the rock bottom. Soon the word spread like wildfire in the office. The younger lot in the office, flabbergasted by Rama Rao's refusal to accept 'collection money', persuaded him to go with them on a picnic to a nearby beauty spot called Kondaveedu. They all stayed at the place for three days. They politely told Rama Rao that he was perfectly unsuitable for a sub-registrar's job. If he did not accept bribes, how on earth was he going to live on a low salary? It was no job for an honest man like him. He won't be able to send his son to a good school, let alone buy a decent sari for his wife. Now that he was being offered a hero's role, a dream come true for any young man - Why not grab it?
For once Rama Rao was in two minds. Several doubts nagged him about his future. He was now in his 25th year. Even though he detested the open corruption in his office, at least he had a government job. He had old parents, a wife and a son to support. Even if he did not have much job satisfaction his activities on the Vijayawada stage through his amateur drama group gave him a sense of fulfilment. There was a certain sense of security—something any youth of his kind from a middleclass family would crave for.

P.Chalapathi Rao, the joint registrar in Rama Rao’s office was a kind man. He knew the ways of the world and Rama Rao respected him for his academic brilliance and worldly wisdom. He was among the people who went to the picnic to Kondaveedu. Chalapathi Rao was fond of Rama Rao and somehow believed that a bright future awaited him in Madras.

Chalapathi Rao argued thus: A government employee’s career was like the tail of a sheep. Beyond a point it never grew. Here was a good opportunity that came your way. It was possible luck would favour you, too. God had blessed you with good looks, education and culture and an ability to act. Fate now beckoned you to Madras. Luck
might not lag behind. Victory favoured the brave. Now that a good opportunity was knocking at your door, be wise and open the door of your fortune.

Rama Rao was all but convinced. His brother Trivikrama Rao too did his bit. "Why hesitate at a crucial moment like this in life? Go ahead and take a chance." On a good day chosen by an astrologer friend he boarded the Madras Mail. His colleagues in the office and those who took part in his stage activities bid him a fond farewell.

A MATTER OF LUCK:

As a matter of fact, Prasad thought Rama Rao was a bit heavy for a hero's role. PALLETRUR PILLA was Subba Rao's first film and Prasad was concerned that Subba Rao was determined to gamble on a virtually unknown entity as the hero.

But Subba Rao had no intention of changing his mind. He smiled and said, "Sir, you are giving me advice like my elder brother. I appreciate your concern and anxiety. With due respect to you, I have already made up my mind about my hero. I would like to sign a contract with him and only

then send him back. If things don’t work out, I can always cancel it. But I don’t want to send him back empty-handed."

A sum of Rs.1116 was offered to Rama Rao as fee for playing the first hero’s role of his life. He gladly accepted it and an agreement was signed and off he went home to Vijayawada, resigned the Sub-registrar’s job exactly three weeks after he took it, and came back to Madras to lunch himself into the screen career—a career that was to make him rich and famous.

One week after signing the agreement, Rama Rao returned to Madras alone, leaving behind his wife and son, to present himself for the shooting of Prasad’s MANA DEBAM.

Portraying realism was almost an obsession with Rama Rao from his very first days on the screen. In his first film as hero, PALLETURI PILLA, there is a scene in which heroine Anjali Devi has to give him a slap on the cheek. For some reason, Director Subba Rao was not satisfied with the shot and asked for its retake again and again.

There is a crucial bull fight scene in PALLENTURI PILLA. It involves a fight between a tough bull and Akkineni Nageswara Rao an equally famous star of the Telugu screen who plays the number two role in this film. Nageswara Rao is felled by the bull and Rama Rao takes him on. Subba Rao procured a sturdy Australian bull for the scene. Nageswara Rao did his bit playfully. The director for a moment thought of hiring a dupe - a duplicate who can do the risky shots for Rama Rao a common practice resorted to. But Rama Rao stoutly refused to let someone else do his scenes.

He clung on to the bull holding one horn. The bull now duly enraged, got wild, lifted Rama Rao, among him around and threw him to the ground in one fell swoop. He fell on the ground but his right hand hit the ground first; thus the entire weight of the body fell on the right hand. He writhed in pain; his wrist, it turned out, had fractured.

When there was no work, Rama Rao would go to Prasad and ask for advice. Prasad would tell him, "Go to the studios, sit in a corner and watch the veterans perform." Like an obedient student, Rama Rao would
dutifully go to studios where Chittoor Nagaiah and Akkineni
Nageswara Rao were shooting. Nagaiah had by then won
acclaim for his portrayal of Yogi Vemana, a famous Telugu
post-saint in a film of that name. Nageswara Rao, though
younger to Rama Rao by 15 months, entered films four years
earlier and already had two hits under his belt: KEELU
16
UGRAM (Magic Hour) and BALA RAJU.

The exercise was useful. Rama Rao picked up his
veteran contemporaries good points. Another good piece of
advice Prasad had given him was to go to the famous Marina
Beach in the city and practice dialogues. It was on this
beach that Rama Rao—then 25 anxious to make good in a
career he'd just taken on and without much work most of the
time—had perfected his dialogue delivery which came in
very handy in his films and later in political life.

The lines he spoke in film after film in his deep and
sonorous voice won him rich praise and made him a superstar. It was the same voice in which he spoke in chaste
Telugu to millions of people who were simply dumbstruck and
overwhelmed by his oratory and voted him to power in
17
January 1983.

16. Ibid., p.70.
17. Telugu Drama Special Issue, (Director, Information and
A LIVING GOD

The first godly role that Rama Rao played was in his 30th film, MAYA BAZAAR. Produced by Vijaya Productions and directed by the famous KV Reddy, it was based on an episode in the Mahabharata, the Hindu epic. Rama Rao played Krishna's role. Initially, Rama Rao never played a godly role and there was considerable opposition from his colleagues when KV Reddy chose Rama Rao to play Krishna's role. His colleagues' hot favourite was a man called Raghuramaiah, who excelled in playing this particular role on the stage.

But Reddy's calculated gamble paid dividends; the film was a huge success! 100 day runs in 24 theatres and silver jubilee in four. Of the 30 films in which he acted up to MAYA BAZAAR as many as 20 had celebrated 100-day runs in 169 theatres, nine films ran for 25 weeks each in 10 halls and one for 50 weeks in one theatre.

It is a fallacy, therefore, to say that it was only in films in which he played godly roles that Rama Rao was primarily successful. He never looked back since. The

---

18. Ibid., p.31.
other godly role he is famous for is that of Rama, the hero of Ramayana, the Hindu epic. Interestingly enough, it was Ravana, the villain in the Ramayana, whose character Rama Rao portrayed before that of Rama. It was in BHODFAILAS, a Telugu film, in which he featured as Ravana. SAMPURNA RAMAYANAM, first made in Tamil and dubbed later into Telugu, was the first film in which he played Rama's role. Both the films were released in 1958.

But the film that brought him instant fame for playing a godly role was SRI VENKATESWARA MAHATYAM. The story of the Lord of the Seven Hills at Tirumala-Tirupati. Directed by P. Pullaiah, a veteran, the black and white film cost Rs.11 lakh to make and was released in 1960. It celebrated silver jubilee, 100 day runs and grossed over Rs.1 crore on barely 20 prints; a record for that time.

The poor Telugu Villagers who could not afford to make the trip to Tirupati instead went to the nearest cinema hall to see the film thoughtfully enough, the film's producers advised owners of the cinema halls to put up an idol of the Lord in front of the halls. The villagers would come, break coconuts, prostrate before the idol, put some coins or crumpled notes in specially erected cash
boxes called HUNDIS (just like the one in Tirumala) and then enter the halls to see the film. Pretty soon, news of this reached the administrators of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD)- even vigilant in matters of this kind. They promptly wrote to Pulliahs, the director and staked their claim to the sum thus collected: Rs. 44,000/-

It was following the release of SRI VENKATESWARA MAHAYAM that the deification of Rama Rao began; 28 Resulullah Road, Rama Rao’s residence at the time in Madras, slowly became a shrine of a kind. Bus loads of pilgrims would arrive every morning from Tirupati. In the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord of the Seven Hills at Tirumala, the pilgrims were face to face with a shimmering and silent idol which only overwhelmed them during those few fleeting seconds. That did not seem enough. A good many of them would head for Madras to see the man who played Lord Venkateswara in flesh and blood.

Krishna is apparently Rama Rao’s most favourite godly role. He acted as Krishna in as many as 17 films out of the 42 mythological films in which he had starred! In four of these films he plays Krishna and Duryodhana as well. In a film called DAANA VEERA SHOORA KARNA (1977), he played Karna, Duryodhana and Krishna too. He also wrote the
script; he produced and edited the film as well. Everyday, by six in the morning he would be made up to play Duryodhana, wear a heavy crown and spend the whole day either acting or directing. This went on for three weeks without a break; during the last three days of shooting, he worked round the clock without a wink of sleep.

The Mahabharata provided material for a majority of his mythologicals: 23 in all. In BRIMADVIRATA PARVAM, (1979) he performed the incredible feat of portraying five roles as diverse as those of Krishna, Duryodhana, Keshchaka, Arjuna and Brihannala. He played Arjuna in four films, Duryodhana in four, Karna in one, and Bhishma and Bhima in one each. The other Hindu epic, The Ramayana, yielded comparatively fewer Rama Rao films: eight. He played Rama in six of them and Ravana in three. In one film, SRI RAMA PATTABHISHEKHAM (1978) he played Rama and Ravana as well he played Vishnu in four and Shiva in one.

What is surprising is that whether he played Krishna or Duryodhana, Rama or Ravana, Karna or Yama Dharmaraja, most of the mythologicals in which he worked did well at the box office. While he is remembered most for playing the

roles of Rama, Krishna and Lord Venkateswara, his positive interpretation of the traditionally negative characters like Ravana, Duryodhana and Karna also won him critical acclaim. The audiences lapped up both kinds of films. LAVA KUSHA made history in the Telugu film industry by becoming the first film to celebrate diamond jubilee by running for 75 weeks during 1963-64. The record was equalled only in 1982 by Akkineni Nageswara Rao's PREMABHISEKAM. Two mythologicals of Rama Rao's celebrated golden jubilees, seven silver jubilees and 25 others had 100-day runs in 225 theatres.

It is not just in godly roles that N.T.Rama Rao captured the hearts and imagination of his audiences. He played all the important emperors and kings in Indian history and folklore; Chandragupta, the great Mauryan emperor; Akbar, the benevolent Moghul emperor; Kishnadeva Raya, the famous Vijayanagara monarch in the 16th century; Dushyanta, the hero of Sanskrit poet Kalidasa's magnum opus SHAKUNTALA; Harishchandra, the king who never told a lie; Bhalli VikramaRaka, the king with unlimited patience and wisdom who had an answer for every riddle asked of him, and Valmiki the sage who penned the Ramayana. In the

mythologicals, he plays divine roles and performs miracles. In folklores, numbering 55, he plays the swashbuckling hero who, bestowed with super human qualities, goes about punishing wicked villains and rescuing assorted princesses with full breasts and large hips, and emerge the victor and walk away with the heroine in the last reel.

On the other hand, while playing the wronged hero in the immensely popular sociais, 184 of them, Rama Rao creasles around himself the halo of a pop Robin Hood, emerging at the end as a law unto himself. In BOBBILIPULI (The Tiger of Bobbili) his 1982 blockbuster, for instance, he plays the hero up against a corrupt society. He retires to a cave from where he metes out rough and ready justice to all wrongdoers. Finally, after his arrest, he defiantly tells the judge: "Because the courts cannot ensure justice, I was obliged to take law into my hands." The audience cheers wildly in approbation.

This in short is how Rama Rao became a cult figure for the state's weekly two-crore cinema-going people who revere him almost as a demi-god.

---

HE IS A DISCIPLINARIAN LEADER.

Still, there was no dearth of novel and morale-boasting gestures. The day Rama Rao was unanimously chosen as the leader of the party's legislative wing, he announced a ten-point code (Ten Commandments) of conduct for his MLA's which forbade them, apart from other things, to interfere with the administration by pushing cases for transfer or promotion. There was an air of no nonsense about the man which has already made the bureaucrat picture him as a strict disciplinarian. Said B.N. Ramana, the State's Chief Secretary, "He appears to be a person determined to get things done."

The state official, mostly grown slothful after years of easy existence, found it hard to cope with the 60 years old man's speed and vitality. On the day he was sworn in, he drove straight from the Lal Bahadur Stadium to his office where he held a cabinet meeting. After that he met senior secretaries to the State Government, and reviewed the situation in the riot-torn old Hyderabad City. He later visited a mosque, a temple, a church and a gurudwara, followed by a visit to Osmania Hospital where the wounded or riot's lay.

Said a Senior Official: Rama Rao has the great advantage of being an actor. He can easily get under the skin of the character he is playing, be it Lord Krishna, Lord Rama or the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. Last fortnight, with only hours of experience in office. Rama Rao was already behaving like quite an old hand at the game. The future of the Telugu Desam will depend squarely on Rama Rao's ability to play. The Chief Minister, not for three hours but for five years more.

But, as Ramoji Rao, the chief editor of Eenadu, observed: changes are that Rama Rao will prove to be the strongest Chief Minister after Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy. Corroborated Akkineni Nageswara Rao, a leading Telugu film star and Rama Rao's friend for 35 years: "I know my friend. He is sincere in everything that he does. He will make a good chief minister."

PARTY LEADER AND ADMINISTRATOR

Few years are admittedly too short a period in the life of any government, particularly if it is headed by a man who is new to politics and administration. But the

23.Ibid.,p.27.
first few years of power are always crucial in a leader's life. His acts of commission and omission during those days should give a clear indication of which way the man is heading. By checking a single grain, says a Telugu proverb, you can tell if a pot of rice is cooked or not. A close look at his performance during the first few years should give an idea about what kind of Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao will make, or what kind of leader of men he is shaping up as.

Virtually unknown outside Andhra Pradesh, Rama Rao suddenly jumped into the confused political arena of his state literally from nowhere only nine months before the election. Roaring like a wounded lion and his blood-red-eyes spitting fire, the man had romped all over the state. He worked up a sleepy and disillusioned people, lionised them and rode to power in an unprecedented fashion. There has never been anything like it in history. What can a man with no history and background do to a great leader like Mrs. Indira Gandhi and a century-old party like the Congress? asked arrogant Congress (I) men. Rama Rao defied them all by delivering a blow to Mrs. Gandhi in her strongest citadel in one swell swoop and ended up making history himself.
By winning a miraculous victory, Rama Rao won the Telugus' admiration and raised their expectations of him; in the process, he has also aroused tremendous curiosity all over the country and abroad. Andhra Pradesh, which hitherto made news for the frequency with which chief ministers were installed and dethroned, is now making news for different reasons. Hard-to-please journalists, hard-boiled politicians, and rich industrialists are suddenly heading for Hyderabad. By March 1983 itself, three European television crews—British, West German and Italian visited Hyderabad to film Rama Rao in action for the benefit of millions of their eager audiences back home.

The coming into power of the N.T. Rama Rao government represents the people's desire for better standards in public life. Thus it is important for the future of this country that the Andhra experiment should succeed, he went on and concluded with a warning: "It would be a tragedy if Rama Rao were to fritter away his advantages by bull-headedness or his messianic zeal. A bit of pragmatism, a bit of humility will do him a world of good."
As a superstar of Telugu film industry, he strode across the Telugu firmament like a colossus for over three decades. Over the years he came to be identified as a man of the masses who came to symbolize their despair and dreams. He is one among them, not above them. A man who roughed it up in childhood and struggled in the initial stages of his life in films, he knows what poverty is all about what it means to starve for a three nights at a stretch. Therefore, it is very easy for him to identify himself with the poor. When he talks about wanting to do something for the poor, he sounds sincere and genuine because there is a earthiness in him. His great advantage has been that he was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth; he never went to a public school in India or a fashionable university abroad. Nor has he read those profound volumes by Marx, Engles, Man and the like. His knowledge has not been acquired in the libraries of Oxford or Cambridge. He has learnt about life and poverty in the villages of his native state and in the streets of Madras where he walked day in and day out, looking for work in the formative years of his life.

Rama Rao says, that "The popular demonstration which was massive and unprecedented strengthened my resolve to
rededicate myself to serve the people of Andhra Pradesh and to strive my utmost to raise the living standards of millions who were below the poverty line. My Government would continue to achieve progress in all spheres and sectors and to ensure a clean, efficient and stable administration responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people."

That is why the people believed in him when he told them that he knew what poverty was all about and that he would do something about it; therefore, they voted him to power. They knew he knew about poverty because he was poor himself once.

The first thing Rama Rao did after the election was to announce that he would take one rupee as his taken monthly salary. He would continue to live in his own bungalow in a crowded locality in Hyderabad, and not move to the ostentatious official residence of the Chief Minister. Unlike his predecessors who loved to zip around in air-conditioned limousines, he chose to go daily by picking out a Fiat. N.T.Rama Rao, rounded off his address to the Party MPs, MLAs and other functionaries with a quotation of Annie Besant.

It read "When I was humiliated you crowned me with honour: while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith: while I was crushed under the heel of tyrannical power, you acclaimed me as your leader: while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me. I was proud to serve in the lowliest fashion but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative."

The moment he was unanimously chosen as leader of the Telugu Desam legislatures Party in the crowded and ornate Jubilee Hall. On 8 January 1983, N.T. Rama Rao issued 10 directives to the newly elected members of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly on behalf of the Telugu Desam. The following are the directives which have come to be known as N.T. Rama Rao's Ten Commandments:

1. Telugu Desam legislators should maintain close and constant relations with the people. When the Assembly is not in session, the legislators should go round their respective constituencies and attend to the people's problems.

2. They should not interfere in administrative matters like transfers and promotions of government officials.

3. They should extend full support to the Government’s efforts in putting down corruption and providing a clean and honest administration.

4. Felicitation and dinners should not be organised in honour of the Chief Minister or Ministers when they go on tour. The legislators should help people represent their problems to Ministers.

5. The legislators should help in curbing the activities of selfish elements as helping the poor and backward classes is the ideal of the Telugu Desam.

6. The MLAs should expose those responsible for blackmarketing and hoarding and other anti-social elements and bring them to the notice of the officials concerned.

7. They should actively participate in the proceedings of the Assembly and bring people’s problems before the House.

8. The legislators should strictly follow the directives issued by the Chief Whip and Whip.

9. They should keep in close touch with party workers and pursue party programmes with full vigour.

10. The legislators should observe strict discipline and
simplicity besides being honest. They should pledge themselves to work for the implementation of the assurance given by the party to the people at the time of the elections.

Being a mass leader, he chose to take the oath of office at the huge Lal Bahadur stadium instead of the lawns of the Governor's residence where only a few hundred could squeeze into witness the ceremony. In the event, a record number of 7.5 lakhs people thronged the stadium to see their hero don a brand new mantle; three people were killed in the stampede that followed.

He took the oath in Telugu, so did his cabinet colleagues. His 14 member cabinet was the smallest in 70 years; the last chief minister to have had such a small ministry was Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. In a half-hour speech laced with noble sentiments and lyrical phrases, he told his audience that he would fulfill all the promises he made in his election manifesto. He would help the poor, strive to get equal rights for women and find employment for the youth. He was aware of the responsibility they had given him. He would try his best to live up to their

29.Ibid., p.132.
Rama Rao attends to party affairs only at home as a matter of principle, and never in the office. By eight he finishes his meeting with party functionaries, intelligence officials and others. He then goes to a large improvised hall behind his residence where people wait to submit their petitions or just to have a glimpse of the man. He collects the petitions himself and hands them over to officials who enter them in a register and give a receipt to every petitioner with the promise that within a month his grievance will be attended to. The crowd comprises a large number of women, young men and old people who patiently wait for long hours to hand him their crumpled petitions or garlands or to exchange a few words with him. Their mission over, they leave with a smile of satisfaction on their faces, to make room for hundreds of others who are waiting outside in the long queues, stretching over several
furlongs. Every day he spends about an hour, receiving these mostly unlettered visitors who come from far-flung villages in the state to tell him their tales of woe in the hope he will do something for them. Each one of the petitions is carefully screened and sent to the concerned department with instructions to get back to the petitioner with a reply in four weeks. Pema Pani, his hands folded, mingled among them freely and made them feel that their visit had been worth all the bother. Daily he received several thousand people. Very often, his visitors outnumber their counterparts who go to see the Prime Minister Mrs. Gandhi at her official residence in New Delhi, Number one, Safdarjung Road.

He has detailed discussions with his officials and cabinet colleagues before taking decisions. Officials and ministers freely air their views and thus expose him to a variety of opinions. He reads the files that are put up carefully, takes the opinions of the bureaucrats and his ministers into consideration and asks a lot of questions. Once convinced what he is doing is right, he likes the decision to be implemented without delay.

Academics and intellectuals around the country are
tearing their hair to figure out Rama Rao's political philosophy. Chances are, they will find no ready-made answer. Rama Rao is beyond their comprehension. He defies everythings that is written in political textbooks. For one thing, he hasn't read those venerable tomes. He is not familiar with the jargon the political scientists flaunt in college classrooms and the cocktail circuit. He is blissfully unaware of all this, and none the worse for it.

The man does not belong to the world of these intellectuals. They cannot nail him down to any slot in the textbooks. He defies any known definition; unable to pin his style of politics down to any familiar philosophy they appear to be confounded. The truth is that the man does not belong to their India but the other India; where the people's concern is not what Rama Rao's political philosophy is but whether he will be able to provide them with two square meals a day, a pair of clothes to wear and a modest place to live in.

N.T. Rama Rao has not lost his zeal and enthusiasm for facing challenges in life. ‘Power,’ said Henry Kissinger, 'is the greatest aphrodisiac.' Often it goes to people's heads. It makes them arrogant and insane. But in Rama
Kao's case. It seems to have done nothing of the kind. It has not changed his lifestyle. He puts in the same amount of effort in his new job as he did in his earlier avocation. If he slugged 16 hours a day reportedly to earn Rs. one lakh during the later days of his film career, he is working for equally long hours with the same determination to achieve results. He has always been rewarded for his labours in the past. There is no reason why he should not succeed in his present assignment because he is putting in the same hard work, if not more; he is sincere and as determined as ever.

The Telugu Desam Party was formed under the stewardship of N.T. Rama Rao on assuming the reins of the State, the Telugu Desam government made up its mind to develop the states in all spheres.

Notable among his decisions are: Rs. 2 per kg. of rice, subsidised supply of Dhotis and Saris for the poor, rural housing Programme for weaker sections, equal property rights to women, abolition of the legislative council, abolishes pensions to former legislators, set up anti-corruption drive, banned the collection of capitalisation fee in educational institutions, and the it has taken various
social and economic measures for the weaker sections under the dynamic leadership of N.T. Rama Rao.

Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Assam Chief Minister, said, "N.T. Rama Rao's Government was very much impressed with the socio-economic programmes taken up by the Telugu Desam Party and its government under the leadership of N.T. Rama Rao. The Telugu Desam Party Government, he said, during the short tenure had achieved remarkable for the welfare of the people."

N.T. Rama Rao was busy restoring order to a hitherto chaotic administration, he did not neglect his party. He and his men know the importance of building a cadre-based party. Brick by brick, through an upward process of elections, they are building up the Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

Charles de Gaulle, the great French leader, has said that to be an eminent administrator and a good leader, one must possess three qualities: intelligence, instinct, and authority. A leader needs both intelligence and instinct in chart the right path; the needs authority to pressure people to follow that path. Some of N.T. Rama Rao's actions have, doubtless, attracted much criticism.