

Kakani, a legendary leader, a true representative of people!

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Kakani Venkata Ratnam died 50 years ago. But he is remembered even now, in Krishna district in particular. He continues to be recalled and inspire many. Last fortnight, for example, a girl's school unveiled Kakani's photo on their campus, Senior Citizens office has now prominently positioned his photo. This is just what I knew personally. An agitation to relocate his statue in a prominent circle in Vijayawada has been on for a while. Many in high positions, including in USA, thank him for their education. Many housewives and small farmers continue to recall his initiative for the milk revolution and elevating their lives. My observation is he is recalled as a leader by even more now than a couple of years ago. How come?



Kakani was in active political life hardly for 35 years (1945-1972). I knew him personally 20 of those years. A local village school dropout, he was a freedom fighter and a small time farmer, he rose to higher position on his own in the party even before a combined Andhra Pradesh and was an MLA and Minister more than once. He made a mark and exemplified himself for the difference he made in their villages, to the future of their children and of course for his services and sterling character in representing people. Examples he had set remain even today as some kind of benchmark for public service by a political leader. He has become a legendary leader. He was not viewed as of any one political party once he took up the campaign for development of the coastal districts.

He died on 25 December 1972 in the midst of a separate Andhra agitation. He suffered heartbreak seeing agitating youth being fired by police at Gannavaram airport. With his death, the agitation petered away. The fate of both Andhra and Telangana districts would have been better and much different had that agitation seen a logical end then, 40 years earlier before the split. Kakani was a known fighter for causes and concerns, mostly against oppression and exploitation. The rich, landed, *zamindars* and interested powers opposed and sabotaged him all through. He neither budged nor yielded at any point. That was how was known as **Ukku Kakani**. (No wonder, a popular state and historical song, seven years

ago, Amaravathi, refers to Ukku Kakani as pride of Andhra). He is remembered also because his strengths are relevant today and a realisation of that is becoming evident. I can recall ten distinct features of Kakani leadership.

The first and foremost was he never considered himself a loner. It was always a team, a team consisting of a combination of casts and communities. They were always together and seen too. They were all of same simple lifestyle, humble backgrounds and from different parts of the district. He had set an example that in electoral politics "solo" will not do. For him it was "we" always, not "me and mine" as it is today. **Second**, that was how win-lose in elections never mattered him. His pursuit continued same way. Kakani lost assembly election twice and won three times. But an election to him was not an end in itself as they have become now. Nor an occasion for money making. Once a poll is over, parties should not come in the way, was his way. **Third**, Kakani never lost his concern and focus on the cause of "underdog", the small and marginal, and victims of powers. Kakani known as a strong man, which he was, but he was also emotional. I witnessed more than once. Once we both went by cycle- rickshaw in Hyderabad to see a homeo doctor. Seeing a cinema wall poster in Abids of one blind and crippled youth, he wanted see that film, Dosti. He could not control his tears all through two hours seeing the two suffer societal neglect. **Fourth**, he set an example for true "crowd funding" against "corporate funding" that leaders and poll contestants rely on today. He never needed big money. Volunteers were his strength. He believed and prompted that the contributors should feel "owning the leader", not vice versa, as it is today. Kakani also showed that even a small contribution prompts people's participation, unlike today.

Fifth, as a District Board President nearly 70 years ago Kakani set an example for district development. His vision was "education first" and went all the way to enhance schools, health was next and infrastructure with irrigation and village connectivity were his focus and he is remembered for what he did in these respects. In fact, what Dr Abdul Kalam preached (unsuccessfully) the idea of PURA, (providing urban services in rural areas), Kakani endeavoured 60 years before. **Sixth**, direct personal contact with individuals across in every village was his way not so much mass or remote ways of grass route connectivity. He believed in consultation process as often, there and then and as widely participative. He never indulged in personal abuse of even opponents all his agitations are on issues of people. **Seventh**, he always remembered, whichever position he held, that it was for a tenure and there will be successor to whom he has to leave good precedents as examples. **Eighth**, he

resisted any schemes to be named by his name. But, so many are there now by his name which have come up after his death. **Ninth**, he never believed in mixing his public life with kith and kin and kept family away all through. I know first-hand his instructions to me, when I was staying in his MLA quarter, was not to allow his only son and he even scolded me for allowing his son overnight. **Tenth**, one basic belief constant was that villages and villagers should not be dependants on Govt. Any youth or students coming his way he conveyed that as his favourite message. He himself maintained that sterling character and he wanted the young to assert themselves. Over six-feet tall, always in white *khadi dhoti-kurta* attire and walk-tall with big eyes, Kakani was a charming and charismatic. The only car, he used although over 20 years was a reconditioned van bought in a military auction. While in Hyderabad he never hesitated use *cycle-rickshaw* (auto yet to come then).

He demonstrated that one need not be elected to represent and serve people or belong to a political party. Death of legendary leaders anywhere should prompt worthy successors who will not forget that they have a choice to be remembered and opt beyond their tenure in power and much beyond.

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