

'UNITED WE STAND
DIVIDED WE FALL'

Unifier

Vol. 1

December 1970

No. 12



Yearly Rs. 8/- post free

Editor E. C. Sastry

Single 00.65 Ps

Editorial & Publishing office, 41, Sardar Sankar Road, Calcutta-29

DR. RAMAN AS WE KNEW HIM AT CALCUTTA

By Vangathamizhan

All great intellectuals of the world have been known to have some characteristics peculiar to them which to the common man would appear irrational or even childish. Who has not been amused by Boswell's Johnson in his biography of the famous man of letters or of the multitude of anecdotes about the erratic behaviour and forgetfulness of Dr. Einstein?

Scientists in particular, have been known for their absent mindedness and eccentricity and the more they are famous, the more has been their propensity to peculiarity

THE ABSENT MINDED PROFESSOR

Dr. Raman when he was attached to the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Bow Bazar, Calcutta, in the good olden days resided in Dr. Gopal Chatterji's house immediately behind the Institute. He was the first President of the Anglo Tamil School at Bowbazar which also housed the Shorthand Writers' Association. On one occasion he came to preside over a function at the Association, wearing only one sandal and with the other foot bare! He spoke with intense absorption on the subject, his

of behaviour or attitude. The late Dr. Raman was no exception, though the intense humanity in him overshadowed what would otherwise have been a subject for amusement or raillery. I have accordingly endeavoured to present below a picture of the man within the frame of the great scientist which endeared him to those who came in contact with him, as I have found from personal knowledge and information gathered from his close associates when he was in Calcutta years ago.

gleaming eyes roving over the assembly, but failing to notice his bare foot. The situation reminded me of another hero Jason of ancient Greek mythology who set out on his great adventure with one foot bare. Two great explorers, who both made history, one in legend and the other in Scientific World.

There was another instance when, absorbed in his constant search in science, he came to the institute leaving behind, his coat and shirt but with his familiar headgear, the turban and the rest

UNIFIER

of his apparel on ! Only when the late Ashu Babu the head clerk of the institute reminded him, he sent for his coat and shirt from his home and donned them. On another occasion, he was found to have had his coat inside out ! At a function arranged in his honour by the National High School, Calcutta of which he was a trustee till his last day, Dr. Raman to the pleasant surprise of the audience, thrust the garland to his coat pocket as soon as it was put around his neck. And while addressing the audience, he was offered coffee which he took from the table, raised the cup to his mouth tilted it to drink the contents. As he was absorbed in his speech, he did not notice the coffee which he thought he was drinking, was actually pouring over his dress !

These and quite a number of other instances found him quite oblivious to his surroundings and to his own external actions, when that powerful mind of his was relentlessly racing in scientific research. Many were the instances when he forgot to pay fare after engaging the taxi. His wife who knew this lapse, advised him to pay in advance. It was no cure- he paid twice occasionally. At times of intense mental activity, food, wash, sartorial change or sleep all were forgotten and his wife had repeatedly to remind him of these, in fact, had him go through those necessities as a mother does to a child. Dr. Raman on reading the cable conveying the good news that he had been awarded the Nobel Prize, skipped about with joy like a child !

UNITING AND UNRELENTING TO WORK

As a scientific explorer, a research scholar in science, Dr. Raman did not observe the conventions of time. He was up in the morning at 4 and from then on his mental activity was in full tune. He had no fixed time, for

he kept his mind ready to receive the right solution to the problem engaging him, that would sooner or later flash in his brain. It could be even at odd hours of the night. On such occasions it was Ramayya, his faithful stenographer that he

UNIFIER

would call, regardless of the hour. He would even send his wife at an ungodly hour to fetch Ramayya. Once it was the renowned (late) Dr. K. S. Krishnan who observed to Ramayya that he was certainly very much in the good books of the great man, "Look" said he, "he has sent me to fetch you personally!"

It cannot be denied that Dr. Raman, far from being the usual scientist of the individual type, was a Universal Scientist, who never lost a moment or opportunity

UNCONVENTIONAL AND UNINHIBITED.

Dr. Raman, like most men of his stature, was independent in his ideas, notions, act, and thoughts. He would, for instance, pick up pebbles and gravel in the course of his daily walk. An observer would think it odd or eccentric. But he would be pleasantly surprised if he knew that it was deliberately done for use in his valuable experiments. Likewise he hated rituals and ceremonial or religious functions which are generally performed without understanding their meaning and without conviction or purpose or true

to explore into the intricacies of nature and of science on which nature is patterned whatever subject engaged him. It was this universality that helped him establish the Institute of Science at Bangalore, which conducts research work in a variety of Scientific fields. His own wide knowledge and insight into the varied branches of science are astounding. One is led to wonder whether he was a University of Science himself.

faith. He was often hard to urge his close neighbour Sri Iyer, who was pious and given to morning and evening ablutions and daily puja, that such things should be left to the women of the household so that he could make better use of precious time. It was one of his tenets that feeding the poor was a better way of celebrating a Sraddha than rituals which conveyed no meaning to the "Karta."

Dr. Raman never stood on ceremonies. His stenographer Ramayya who had occasion to observe him at close quarters had

UNIFIER

known the learned doctor to prepare his own coffee when he woke up from bed at 4 A. M. without disturbing the cook. He could not bear an array of pictures being hung up on walls for instance, as they distracted him from scientific thoughts, and would without ado smash them with his stick. Likewise he abhorred publicity

and hated wasteful and time-consuming celebrations. One could however, not properly explain his adherence to the tuft of hair at the back of his head like orthodox brahmins or to the traditional turban which was almost inseparable from his head, for he relinquished it only when retiring at night.

THE INNER MAN

In the midst of his hectic search for Truth through the medium of science, through his absent-mindedness and his unconventionality, one could be well aware of his intense humanity and awareness of his associates and of men and woman attached or known to him. He was as faithful a husband as Lokasundari Raman was a devoted and affectionate wife. It gave him immense pleasure to extol the sterling qualities of Mrs. Raman and the pleasure was greater when others praised her within his knowledge. Dr. Radha Krishnan who was Dr. Raman's close friend once likened them to Sri Rama and Sita Devi of the "Epics" referring to Dr.

Raman's steadfastness and fidelity and faithfulness to his wife and to Mrs. Raman's life of love and sacrifice for her husband. I can still remember his words, "Sir C. V. Raman has chosen Lokasundari (Sita) not for glossy surface but for such qualities as would wear well!"

His love of children was above ordinary. Busy as he was, he found time to spend a precious hour everyday to play with the children of Sri Iyer, his neighbour at Calcutta, and would take them out for a walk.

He used to relax himself from his strenuous work by reading 50 pages of a novel every night before retiring.

UNIFIER

He was a witty, though his remarks at times revealed, besides wisdom and perception, a certain amount of sarcasm and contempt for the ordinary person and attitude of men and cynicism and bitterness with the world. Once when questioned about his tuft of hair, he maintained that it was no hindrance to his pursuits but on the contrary restrained electric energy from going out of his body. On another occasion when a reference was made to his turban he said that it was worn to prevent his head from swelling. But with all his sarcasm and cynicism and noticeable consciousness of intellectual superiority, Dr. Raman was all consideration for those around him and never forgot them or their needs. A striking instance of this facet of his character was known when in 1954 or so, he came to Calcutta and had an appointment with Sri C. S. Ranga-swamy, the then editor of "Indian Finance". He was late for the appointment by nearly two hours. When he arrived, it transpired that he had queued up at Kalighat Post office personally to make a remittance to his cook at Bangalore as promised by him.

When felicitated for his great discovery called after him the "Raman Effect", he gratefully acknowledged in public his indebtedness to the team of assistants headed by Dr. K. S. Krishnan for their untiring zeal and help and to Bengal, especially to late Sir Ashutosh Mukherji, the great savant and educationist for the facilities placed at his disposal.

It will be interesting to know that he was instrumental, though unknowingly, in saving the life of the then Governor of undivided Bengal who was shot at by a girl student during Dr. Raman's address at the Calcutta University convocation. The assailant was said to have deposed that Dr. Raman's habit of walking about on the dais when speaking had made her miss the target!

Dr. Raman had profound faith, in man, the highest creation of God as he is capable of creating things. He could be nearer to God, by enquiry, search and research and not by sitting quiet with hands folded, eyes closed and doing nothing useful. In fact, he has proved that work is worship by which man can come nearer to God with that power-the energy

UNIFIER

latent in him by experimenting on Truth-God.

He was a gem amongst men as the diamond, on which one of his famous discoveries on light refraction is based, is deemed the gem of all gems. He is no more amongst us, but with the memory of his

fame, will linger also the memory of the man that he was in the minds of those fortunate few who had the opportunity of his personal acquaintance or of close knowledge about him. He was a source of inspiration to the modern scientists and the future yet to come. May his soul rest in peace.
