

# A passion for peace

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While people know his scientific life quite well, not many have known his personal idiosyncrasies and struggles... his life. Bringing this side of him rather than his science to the reader is Uma Parameswaran's biography on Raman. And she has relied on many people to bring to fore the man behind his science.

Events that will present Raman as an emotional patriot is ample described in her biography. For example, when Raman was 42, he rose to receive the Nobel prize in Stockholm on 10 December 1930. He broke down in tears because 'when I turned round and saw the British Union Jack under which I had been sitting... I realised that my poor country, India, did not even have a flag of her own - and it was this that triggered off my complete breakdown'.

His influences have been profound and he was passionate about them. Uma mentions about one of his influences and how intensely emotional he was. When on 18 April 1955, Albert Einstein died in Princeton, Raman 'promptly sent for a barber to have his head shaved, a Hindu ritual performed by a man on his father's death'.

His thoughts were not very vocal but his science was. But there are instances when his passion did come out.

He indeed reflected on the thought that when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you. So after thanking the presenters of the Lenin Peace Prize for 'outstanding services in the struggle for the preservation and consolidation of peace' in Russia, in his speech, he regretted that advancements in Physics were being used to manufacture weapons of destruction.

'Japan had experienced the power of this weapon...but those who created this weapon failed to take note of the fact that other countries too could develop this weapon and that they themselves could fall victims to similar or more terrible trials'.

Delving deep into Raman's priorities, Uma further says, "When the

government considered Raman for the 'vice-presidentship (sic) of India, he is said to have laughed it off with a 'What would I do with that ship?'

She also reflects on how highly sacrosanct Raman considered the teacher's role. She tells about the time when Raman was given India's highest honour- the Bharat Ratna.

When President Rajendra Prasad sent a telegram on the evening of 19 January 1955 asking when he would be arriving, Raman sent a reply the next day stating he would not be present because 'I am firmly tied down here to enable one of my students to complete his Doctorate thesis which the regulation requires him to submit to his University before the end of January. Thus my duty as a teacher has to take precedence over my own personal affairs'.

Uma also explains his relationship with Nehru. Once when Nehru was in Bangalore, Raman gave Indira Gandhi a conducted tour and told her, 'Tell your papa what you saw and ask him to visit my institute'. Later he got a call

from Nehru's secretary that Nehru would like to visit the institute the next morning.

Since Raman made no secret of the contempt he felt for the lip-service of politicians, not many were on his side. Nehru, however, was above that. He clearly thought very well of Raman, but Raman felt that newly independent

India was taking the wrong road in its science planning and Nehru was responsible for it.

It irked him that the government was bent on spending millions of rupees importing instruments instead of encouraging Indian technicians and craftsmen, in whose competence Raman had great faith.

With this biography, Uma does present a man who was not just passionate but had the knack to pass on his passion in a manner of supreme benevolence that may not be found today, but can only be quoted till time immemorial.

