

RAJAJI — SOME VIGNETTES

[Rajaji's birthday falls on December 8. Here are some extracts from the book by Sri Masti Venkatesa Iyengar on the elder statesman which spotlight the many facets of this multi-splendoured personality.]

SRIMAN CHAKRAVARTI RAJAGOPALACHARYA, whom our country lost on 25th December 1972, was a great Indian. Towards the end of his life he became a great world figure. He attained this greatness as a result of great powers of intellect, of devotion to great causes and the sacrifices he made in the interest of those causes. He was the first and the only Indian Governor-General of pre-Independence India and filled other high places in the official hierarchy with success and dignity. This was exterior greatness visible to the naked eye. But equally remarkable was the inner greatness of his spirit, the beauty of the personality that developed through the years. Sacrificing personal comfort and friendships in the last years as he had sacrificed a prosperous career in the earlier years for great causes, Rajaji's spirit in the closing years, selfless, noble, gracious and vibrant, was more beautiful than ever before.

"CALM AND QUIET"

How Rajaji impressed people in those earlier years is well stated by Sri G. Ramachandran in the following passage.

"I met Rajaji for the first time in 1921. Nothing could have been more remarkable, even historic, than the setting in which I first met him. Gandhiji was undergoing the 21-day fast on behalf of Hindu-Muslim unity. The immediate scene was the house 'Dilkush' in the Delhi suburb. Dilkush had become at once the house of a supreme anguish of the spirit as also the point on which the entire mind of India converged. Leaders and friends of Gandhiji from all over India had assembled in Delhi. Rajaji was one of them. I was also in Delhi staying with my professor from Shantiniketan, Mr C. F. Andrews, who had come to take care of Gandhiji during the

fast. Into Mr Andrews's room came almost every leader of the time in India. And I had then my first impression of many of them as a young student.

"In this setting there came Rajaji whom everybody called C.R. My first impression, 'what a quiet and calm person!' He came and went without any fuss or show of importance. And yet there was something in his emaciated and intellectual face which compelled one to look at him again... Constancy was writ large on his striking countenance. I found Mr C. F. Andrews particularly fond of Rajaji and every time they came, they talked to each other most intimately of Gandhiji and the communal unity conference then being held in Delhi under the Chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru. One day the Metropolitan of India, Dr Westcott, came in and he talked to Mr Andrews about the progress of the Unity Conference. I almost remember some of his very words. 'There are two persons at the Conference who are rising above all narrow and communal considerations, and making profound impression on the Conference and these are Pandit Motilal Nehru and Mr C. Rajagopalachari from Madras'. In fact, the same day in a letter which Mr Andrews wrote to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, he quoted these very words."

"When Rajaji came to take leave of Mr Andrews, my professor introduced me to him, and Rajaji, taking me for a Tamilian, asked in Tamil from which part of Tamil Nadu I came. When I told him I came from Travancore he humourously remarked, 'We are all Tamils in the South.' How often have I remembered this in later years. As soon as Rajaji left, my professor said to me, 'There is the man who understands Bapu more than any one else in India.'"

PREMIERSHIP OF MADRAS

When Rajaji formed his first Government in Madras, he was practically in the position of a person who is being tested to see if he is capable of doing what he

says he can. Can the Indians look after themselves? The future of India depended upon the success of this government of Rajaji and ten others in other provinces formed at the time. It is to Rajaji's great credit that he achieved notable success in administration and won acclaim. His Government administered the State as efficiently as the government manned by British officers previously.

NEIL'S STATUE

One act of Rajaji as Prime Minister of Madras came to receive much notice at the time. There was a statue of a military officer of the name of Neil in a public square in the city. On the pedestal was carved a legend which offended the self-respect of the population. There has been a complaint about this previously. But the Government did not heed it. The men in power were mostly English and most of them were supposed to have liked the idea of reminding the population that it belonged to a subject country. Soon after Rajaji became Chief Minister he ordered the removal of the statue. This was done. Rajaji had the statue placed in the Madras Museum. Our people were, of course, very happy that this had been done. Non-Indian officers of the Government could not accept the action tamely. The Government of England was asked if the report of the removal of the statue was true. In the enquiry which followed, Rajaji gave the reply that the public resented the legend under the statue and that he had it removed to safety in the museum to prevent possible harm. Rajaji's real reason could not be this, but it was a way of getting smoothly out of an inconvenient position.

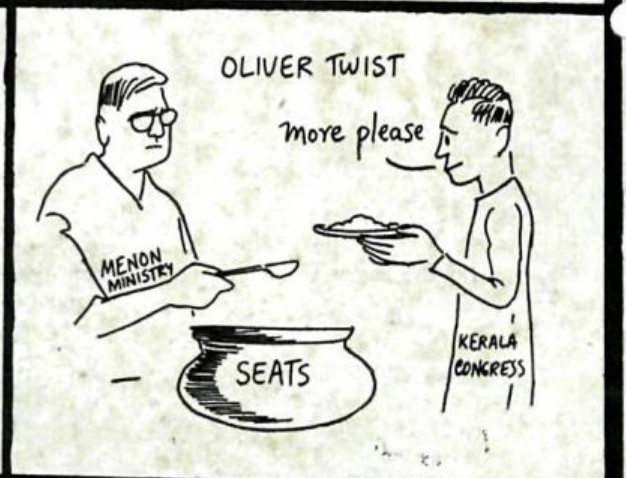
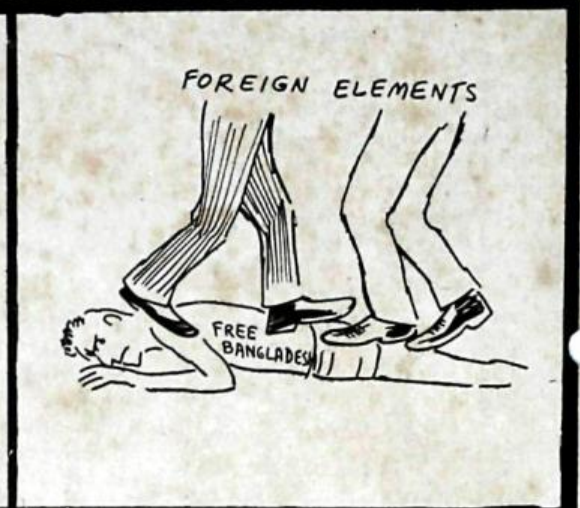
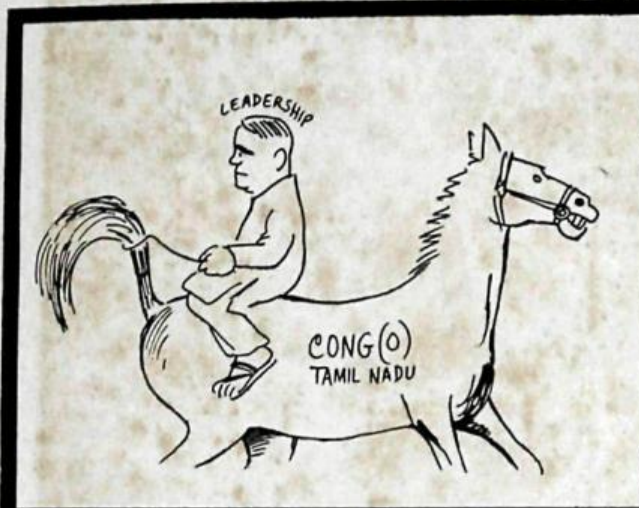
A WISE STATESMAN & A GREAT PATRIOT—PATEL

Unveiling a portrait of Rajaji in Madras in 1949, Sardar Patel paid him the following tribute:

He deemed it a great honour to be associated with the function where he had been asked to un-

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JUST THINK OF IT !



RAJAJI—SOME VIGNETTES

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veil the portrait of a life-long friend and colleague. It was not easy to enumerate in a few sentences the life-work of a great man like Rajaji. He had been in public life with Rajaji from the beginning up to now. "We have both been in the struggle together for thirty years and although occasions have arisen when we have differed, that never made the slightest change in our mutual regard, affection, love or admiration."

"Rajaji is an acknowledged leader of our country. He is a great and wise statesman. It is our fortune to have in a period of crisis the guidance of one on whom we can rely for advice and counsel. It was he who laid the foundations of parliamentary life in Madras, when we took office for the first time in a limited field of parliamentary life. Those were days when doubts were expressed as to the capacity of our people to carry on the work efficiently. There were also those who watched us; and not only watched us but wished to put us down. Today, we are in a different position. We are masters in our own house, and in our country. It is for us to make or mar our future. The future of the country depends on how we behave today and tomorrow and in the near future for a period of two, three or five years. Free India, the child born only a year ago, needs careful handling, careful feeding and strengthening. But people want it to run before it has learnt to walk. In this context, it is our good fortune that a great administrator, a wise statesman, and a great patriot is at the helm of our affairs."

RESOURCEFULNESS AND KEENNESS OF INTELLECT

Dr Rajendra Prasad, unveiling a portrait of Rajaji some time later said, that he considered it a great privilege to be associated with the function. It was his good fortune, he said, to have known Rajaji intimately since they both came into contact with Mahatmaji, over thirty years ago.

"During the long period it has been my privilege to have enjoyed, I would not say his friendship but his love to a younger brother. I have in my own way tried to reciprocate the same love to an elder brother. Mahatmaji made heroes out of clay. No wonder that Rajaji, who is certainly no clay—who was all gold—was made into diamond by Mahatmaji. During this long period, there have been occasions when Rajaji had not seen eye to eye with Mahatmaji. He has imbibed the great teachings of Mahatmaji and has lived after them in his own life." It was as a result of imbibing these teachings that Rajaji found courage to say, as he himself had heard him say to Mahatmaji, "You are doing something which is not quite consistent with what you have been teaching us." It required not only great courage but strength of conviction which is not easily possessed by ordinary people. What is more, he not only said that to Mahatmaji but also lived according to the dictates of his own conscience.

Paying a tribute to Rajaji's resourcefulness in a crisis and keenness of intellect, Dr Rajendra Prasad said: "To many of us who were younger, Rajaji has been a source of inspiration. He has guided us, he has fed us, and even today in moments of difficulty we look up to him for help and guidance. As has been pointed out, he is never lacking in initiative and resourcefulness. Possessing a keen intellect, he possesses an equally facile pen. We know how fluently he writes and how fluently he speaks. I have heard him address numerous gatherings. Especially in North India, it was my good fortune to act as his interpreter. I have gathered from experience, how in simple words and simple sentences he can make the audience go with him the way he wanted them to go. There is none of the histrionic performances in his speeches: yet the effect is usually marvellous, because, not only is the logic complete and irrefutable but the way of saying things in so appealing to the audience that as he himself has told me once, he can rouse



"Your husband agreed to pay me 25 per cent of what he'd have spent on petrol . . ."

them to anger and he can make them also shed tears if he liked. That is the trait of a great speaker and I found that he possessed that trait, though when speaking, he hardly used any gesture or histrionic method."

INTEGRITY AND SELF-SACRIFICE

Pandit Nehru, on a similar occasion, paid him the following tribute:

"For the last twenty-eight years, I have been closely associated with Rajaji and we have faced many crises together, many difficulties and problems. We have sometimes differed from each other and have parted company on the political field. But, again, we have met to cooperate and work together. So, when I think of him, I hardly think of him as the Governor-General of India but rather as a close colleague with whom I have worked for all these many years."

"I must say here that very few persons there are in India, with whom I should like to discuss any intricate problem or issue, more than Rajaji. I do not know if, after a discussion with him I would agree with him or not, but I am quite sure that a discussion with him would do me good and probably I would agree with him. That is the type of keen mind, the mind of a person of the highest integrity and self-sacrifice. That, I say, is an invaluable asset to a nation."

—Courtesy: Rajaji, By Masti Venkatesa Iyengar

