

For the modernizing Tamil Brahmin of those days, Rajaji was *shi generis*. This was a man who had been the first Indian governor-general, sitting where Robert Clive and Warren Hastings had once sat. This was the man who was related by marriage to Mahatma Gandhi, a man who had followed his Master in opposing Untouchability and promoting Hindu-Muslim harmony. What made these progressive views more palatable to families such as mine was that Rajaji was no left-wing atheist but a deeply believing Hindu. Rajaji further endeared himself to us by his superb understanding of the language of professional advancement, English.

Like Gandhi, Rajaji was a committed Hindu who yet had an abiding love for Christ and Christian values. He would not have minded dying on Christmas Day, but would not, I think, have wanted to so comprehensively push a Test match result off the front page. For unlike the Mahatma he liked outdoor sports. His own boyhood hero was a cricketer, B. Jayaram, his fellow student at Central College, Bangalore. Jayaram was a greatly gifted left-handed all-rounder, of whom his British principal wrote: 'Had he the same opportunities as W.G. Grace he would have been as great, for he had an eye as quick and a wrist as supple as the Doctor's.' (This was an opinion possibly shared by W.G., for, while studying geology in London, Jayaram was chosen to play for the Doctor's crack team, London County.)

I recently came across the full-page spread run on Boxing Day, 1972, by Rajagopalachari's hometown newspaper, *The Hindu*. This extended obituary was embellished by as many as seven pictures. The pictures were: (1) Rajaji leading a group of Congress volunteers in 1930, en route to breaking the salt laws in Vedaranyam; (2) Rajaji opening a TB sanatorium in 1939, while serving as Prime Minister of Madras; (3) Jawaharlal Nehru introducing his cabinet colleagues to Rajaji when the latter took over as the first Indian governor-general in 1948; (4) Rajaji with his cabinet colleagues while chief minister of Madras, in 1953; (5) Rajaji, again as chief minister of Madras, wishing Andhras good luck on the formation of their state in 1953; (6) Rajaji receiving the Bharat Ratna from the president of India in

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The Wisest Man in India: Aspects of C. Rajagopalachari



I. A Life's High Points

The first and, as it happens, last time I wept at the death of a political leader was on the 26th of December 1972. I was already distraught, for the previous day I had watched the last day of my first Test match, and India had lost. The morning after, the cricket news was not even on the front page. This was taken over, for the most part, by the death of Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, lawyer, scholar, philosopher and statesman, the man whom Mahatma Gandhi had called 'the keeper of my conscience'.

Gandhi died before I was born, and Nehru died when I was only six. Rajaji was the one man left over from an age when the profession of politics still drew in men of character and integrity. Being a sentimental sort of fellow, I suppose I would have wept anyway, but the tears flowed more freely because the leader who had just died came from my own community of Tamil Brahmins. My father subscribed to *Swarajya*, the Swatantra Party weekly where Rajaji spoke out in opposition to the socialist heresies of Indira Gandhi. My mother had bought Rajaji's translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which I read and re-read both for the lucid language and the extravagant colourfulness of their contents.

favour of better relations with Pakistan, and for allowing the people of Kashmir to live with dignity and honour. And he was an early advocate of market-based economics, a critic of what he memorably called the 'licence-permit-quota-raj', a phrase which ranks with the 'Hindu rate of growth' in describing an entire epoch of India's economic history, but which no one now remembers as originating in Rajaji's mind.

It seems to me that Rajaji's political career was characterized above all by a desire for reconciliation. Reconciliation between Hindu and Muslim, India and Pakistan, India and England, North India and South India, low caste and high caste: these were the recurrent themes of his public life. In a society marked by the deliberate encouragement of conflict and antagonism, his was a rocky road indeed. As he once wrote to a Quaker friend, 'those who are born to reconcile seem to have an unending task in this world.'

There was more to this life than politics. Thus Rajaji was, at various times, a successful lawyer and municipal administrator, a gifted short story writer (in Tamil), and a superbly effective popularizer of our epics. Rajaji liked to claim that 'the best service I have rendered to my people is the re-telling of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.' These stories he told with a telling simplicity and directness, and without any theoretical gloss. For, as he said, 'the *Ramayana* is mother's milk for India. It should be left to itself and not philosophized. Mother's milk should not be sent to the chemical analyst!'

Once, while asked to give a speech in memory of Gandhi by the Mysore Assembly, Rajaji warned the organizers that he had 'a partiality for restraint in eulogy'. This eulogy of Rajaji has not been restrained, but it must at least make an attempt to be founded. I thus take note of his sometimes acid tongue, and, more seriously, of his consistent unwillingness to face the electorate. In 1952, much against Nehru's wishes, he set the unfortunate precedent of choosing nomination to the Upper House in order to become chief minister of his state. Then again, Rajaji had a somewhat conservative attitude towards women. He saw them as home-makers and carriers of our culture, but not really as independent in their own right. As Paula

1954; (7) Rajaji with John F. Kennedy at the White House in 1962, where he had gone as the head of a Gandhian peace delegation.

This was a heroic attempt at illustrating the high points of Rajaji's political career. But, perhaps out of respect or deference it omitted the low points. These included the last-minute denial to him of the office of president of India in 1950; and his unceremonious exit, at his own party's command, from the office of chief minister of Madras in 1954. Apparently, when Rajagopalachari's parents had had his horoscope cast, the astrologer told them that their baby's future would include 'the fortunes of a king, of an exile, of a guru, and of an outcaste. The people will worship him; they will also reject him. He will sit on an emperor's throne; he will live in a poor man's hut.'

I don't know whether Rajaji himself believed in astrology. I somehow doubt it. But he had an uncanny knack of being wise before the event, and paying for it. In 1941-2 he proposed to the Congress that they work out an accommodation with the Muslim League. He was vilified for this: had he been listened to, perhaps we might have been spared the bloodletting of Partition. Then he opposed the Quit India movement, saying that the need rather was for constructive engagement with the British. The Congress big shots didn't listen--and indeed forced him to leave the party--but in retrospect he was proved right. By calling for a militant rebellion when the British were fighting a desperate battle for survival against Hitler and company, the Congress forfeited their trust. By sitting out the bulk of the war in prison, they allowed the Muslim League to go from strength to strength.

In 1951, as home minister in Nehru's cabinet, Rajaji warned the prime minister of the expansionist designs of Communist China. He wrote to Nehru that he felt 'hurt whenever Pannikar [the Indian ambassador in Beijing] tells us with extreme satisfaction that China is very friendly to us yet has no territorial ambitions. We do not want any passions now, do we?' Eleven years later, by which time Rajaji and Nehru were in opposing political parties, India was invaded by China.

Those three acts cannot be undone, but in some other cases we might still take advantage of Rajaji's prescience. He was always in

building on that road'; and the range of his reading. Stacked on a desk in front of Rajaji were G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories; two books on modern biology; Lewis Mumford's *Conduct of Life*; Valmiki's *Ramayana* (in Sanskrit); and a few Tamil works. These would be read over the next few weeks: waiting, in a book-case along the wall, were twelve volumes of the speeches of Edmund Burke, and an edition of Shakespeare.

II. Rajaji and Gandhi

As a young lawyer in Salem, Rajaji stumbled upon the works of Henry David Thoreau: his book, *Walden*, as well as his classic essay on civil disobedience. Then he read of an Indian lawyer who was putting these ideas into practice in South Africa. In 1913 he reprinted, at his own expense, a pamphlet describing Gandhi's jail experiences. After Gandhi's return to India in January 1915, he followed his activities with increasing fascination. However, he had to wait four years to meet him, their first encounter being in Madras in March 1919, in a house owned by the proprietor of *The Hindu*, Kasturiranga Iyengar.

When the two men met, Gandhi was planning his satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act. Rajaji energetically joined in, following the path of non-cooperation with the fervour of a convert. He went to jail in December 1921 and, after he came out a few months later, started an ashram of his own in Tiruchengode, to promote the Gandhian programme of khadi, prohibition, Hindu-Muslim harmony, and the abolition of untouchability. By now his law practice was a thing of the past. Then, when Gandhi announced a fresh round of satyagraha in 1930, he chose Rajaji to be the first to break the salt laws in South India.

Rajmohan Gandhi writes that, in all these campaigns, 'the Mahatma received C.R.'s instant understanding and wholehearted loyalty'. Another knowledgeable historian, Antony Copley, has called Rajaji 'Gandhi's Southern Commander'. Or, as the collector of Tanjore at the time of the Salt Satyagraha put it, he was 'probably the ablest and certainly one of the most intransigent' of Gandhi's followers.

Richman points out, this attitude informs the depictions in his *Ramayana* of Shurparakha, and of Sita. Rajaji also abhorred the idea of women working. When a lady with small children approached him for a job, he remarked: 'I wonder how a woman with children can be wanting work! Alas for civilization and the pernicious habit of entrusting the education of children to professional men and ourselves seeking odd work to fill our time!'

Like his mentor Gandhi, Rajaji cannot be easily pigeon-holed into the convenient labels—liberal, socialist, or conservative—of modern political thought. Forced to choose, one would, very reluctantly, have to call him a 'conservative' (lower case); but still, a rather special kind of conservative. A man who knew him well, the Australian diplomat Walter Crocker, provides this brilliant capsule summary of his personality:

Endowed with an exceptionally strong and quick mind, Rajaji was in spirit harmonious and without volatility or anything partaking of the theatrical. Vanity was excluded from his nature. Although he had so much affinity for traditional India, he knew the lore of the West, having a good acquaintance with the Bible and Plato and the English classics as well as with Jurisprudence and Economics; and he knew the case for economic development. Although he was religious, and conservative, he was not conformist. He had the true conservative's trait of combining scepticism about what man-made systems can do for human nature with the personal kindness to individuals which socialists, dealing with human beings as statistical groups and abstractions, sometimes lack. And he had wit—that life-renewing gift.

Rajaji was not safe from human frailty or blindness. Still, seeing his life and career in the round, one might agree with the judgement of R.G. Casey, the bluff Australian who served as Governor of Bengal, that he 'was the wisest man in India'. At any rate, the wisest politician, and perhaps the best-read one, too. In April 1956, a journalist named N.S. Muthana went to meet Rajaji at his house. He was struck by two things: the lack of distinction of this former governor-general's abode—a modest single-storied structure which looks like any other

Rajaji could tell Gandhi that he was being irresponsible, and he could also tell him that he was wrong: never more bravely than in the summer of 1942, when he went completely against the grain of nationalist opinion in opposing the Quit India movement. Rajaji thought a fresh satyagraha foolish when the situation demanded dialogue and reconciliation with both the British and the Muslims. As he bravely (and as it turned out correctly) put it: 'There is no reality in the fond expectation that Britain will leave the country in simple response to a Congress slogan.' Besides, by asking the British to leave, the Congress was issuing an open invitation to a colonizing power more brutal by far, than the Japanese. Fortunately, said Rajaji, Britain 'cannot add to her crimes the crowning offence of leaving the country in chaos to become a certain prey to foreign ambition.'

This opposition made ordinary Congressmen abuse and even—at a meeting in Bombay—throw black tar at Rajaji. The Mahatma, characteristically, would not allow political disagreement to come in the way of personal friendship. Their ties had been strengthened by the marriage, back in 1933, of Gandhi's son Devadas to C.R.'s daughter Lakshmi. I found a lovely little note of 1935, written from Rajaji's ashram in Tiruchengode. 'Lakshmi and babies are doing well in this climate. Specially Tara enjoys the open space and dustless, motor-less, grounds available for her tiny wanderings.' As the years went by, Rajaji's manifest interest in their grandchildren allowed Gandhi to develop, almost for the first time, a love for little babies who were descended directly from him.

Rajaji could disagree with Gandhi—and disagree sharply—but on some fundamental issues he was completely with a man whom he variously addressed in letters as 'My dearest Master', 'My dear Mahatmaji', and 'My dear Bapu'. One such issue was the abolition of untouchability, whose centrality to the Gandhian struggle Rajaji recognized earlier than any member of Gandhi's inner circle. A second was Hindu-Muslim harmony, a cause to which he was as devoted as the Mahatma himself. A third concerned the dignity of labour. Spinning, cleaning toilets, cleaning one's shoes—all these came easily to him,

On two separate occasions Rajaji was Gandhi's front man in beating off a challenge from Bengal, the province that had been in the vanguard of the freedom struggle before the Mahatma's rise. In the Nagpur Congress of 1922 he made the decisive speech that turned the hall against Chittaranjan Das's promotion of council entry and in favour of Mahatma Gandhi's more militant programme of non-violent non-cooperation. Seventeen years later, he made another sharp speech at the Tripuri Congress, held on the banks of the river Narmada. Rajaji's barbs were aimed again at the Bengal party, but he spoke this time from the side of caution, rather than radicalism. For the office of president, the Gandhians had put up Pattabhi Sitaramayya to oppose the incumbent seeking re-election, Subhas Chandra Bose. Rajaji's intervention was marked by the sarcasm for which he was notorious:

There are two boats on the river. One is an old boat but a big boat, piloted by Mahatma Gandhi. Another man has a new boat, attractively painted and beflagged. Mahatma Gandhi is a tried boatman who can safely transport you. If you get into the other boat, which I know is leaky, all will go down, and the river Narmada is indeed deep.

As a disciple of Gandhi, Rajaji was mostly loyal but never subservient. He could speak to him with a clarity and directness beyond the reach of most other followers. When, in 1924, the Mahatma threatened to abandon politics for social work, C.R. told him that would leave the 'national organisation [the Congress] to vacillation and drift'; indeed, it would have 'the worst consequences' for the future of the freedom movement. Ten years later, the Mahatma moved to retire again, a decision with which even Patel and Rajendra Prasad seem to have acquiesced. This time Rajaji was even more forceful in his dissent. 'Your retirement from the Congress will be a suicidal step', he told Gandhi: 'An intense and irrevocable feeling of defeatism will spread over the whole nation, and kill political hope and enterprise . . . If you think you can retire from the Congress now and keep it and yourself both or either politically important, I think you will be sorely disappointed.'

India will be lost if the opportunity to serve the world with his message and teachings is lost. You are I believe the fittest one to lead India in the Mahatma way. Muslims should be made to realize that the Mahatma way is the Quranic way.

A yearning and sad soul cries to you from near the humble seat of the great man . . . to lead India to fulfil the Mahatma's message of Ahimsa. Truth, Casteless and Classless society.

In 2009, as in 1948, the future of India seems to hinge critically on the relationship that the dominant community of Hindus is able to negotiate with members of other religious groupings – to beat them into submission, or to work co-operatively with them. These were the alternatives once offered to Gandhi and Rajaji; and these are the alternatives now offered to us.

Would that we choose as wisely as they.

III. Rajaji and Nehru

In the course of the past year or two, I have spent many absorbing days looking at the Rajaji papers, housed at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in Delhi. This vast collection contains original letters from world statesmen as well as by unknown Indians. Sometimes the latter are as interesting and insightful as the former. Consider a letter to Rajaji written in 1953 by a mofussil Tamil named Anantharaman. This offers the view that Rajaji, Nehru and Patel were, respectively, the 'head, heart and hands of Gandhiji'.

This is most appositely put. For Rajaji was unquestionably the most intelligent of Gandhi's close disciples, Nehru arguably the most humane, and Patel the most disciplined and practical. The pity is that they could never function together except for a very brief while. The relationship between Nehru and Patel has attracted much attention. Here I focus on the no less intriguing relationship between Nehru and Rajaji.

During the freedom movement, Nehru and Rajaji were comrades rather than companions. They were separated by upbringing: one

although they were scorned by his fellow Iyengar Brahmins and by the fashionably left-wing nationalists with whom he was also obliged to consort.

When Gandhi was assassinated on 30th January 1948, Rajaji was serving as the first Indian Governor of Bengal. He flew to Delhi to attend the cremation and came back with a portion of the ashes. The ceremony in the Hooghly has been described in a memoir by the governor's military secretary, Bimanesh Chatterjee. A motor launch took the party to the middle of the river, and the governor was handed over the urn containing the ashes for immersion. As he took the urn 'he became so overwhelmed that . . . he perilously swayed forward, and a couple of us had to hold him back. . . . When Rajaji finally sat down, he appeared exhausted. As the boat was speeding towards the bank, Rajaji said, "The ashes were pulling me".'

Two letters to Rajaji illustrate what united him with Gandhi, and what divided them both from some other kinds of Indians. The first, written in October 1946 by a lawyer living in Sandur, chastised Rajaji for prescribing non-violence. This man sarcastically asked whether 'because Gandhijee sings praises of non-violence in season and out of season, you too (being his relative) feel like delivering your sermon?' The lawyer disapproved of the sermon, and seemed to think there were less and less people willing to hear it. 'Consciousness has dawned upon the minds of the Hindus (even Congressite Hindus) that consolidation as Hindus would alone save them from political extinction. To-day's Hindu nation does not recognise "M.K.'s" and "C.R.'s"! It needs Savarkars and Mookerjees!'

The second letter was written to Rajaji on 12 February 1948 by a Muslim living in Sevagram:

Dear Brother,

Sitting in the busy little cottage of the Mahatma—busy with the crowds coming in to look at his vacant seat . . . —I am turning to you in sad contemplation.

We need prophets. I am convinced that we are left without a prophet now.

they both took heed of the Mahatma's message, working to reconcile competing points of views and alternative cultural or religious traditions. Particularly memorable was a handwritten letter of Nehru's that I came across. It was dated 30 July 1947, and it read

My dear Rajaji,

This is to remind you that you have to approach Shanmukham Chetty—this must be done soon.

I have seen Ambedkar and he has agreed . . .

Yours
Jawaharlal

This brief note requires some explanation. R.K. Shanmukham Chetty was a businessman in the South widely admired as being one of the best financial minds in India. Ambedkar, the Dalit leader, was a brilliant legal scholar. But both had been lifelong enemies of the Congress. Now, a mere two weeks before the political freedom Rajaji and Nehru had spent years in prison for, they were approaching these old adversaries to join the first cabinet of free India. It was a gesture remarkable in its wisdom and generosity. In the event, but only after overcoming the hostility of the other Congressmen, Chetty became finance minister; Ambedkar, minister for law.

In 1950 Nehru hoped to be able to make Rajaji the first president of the Republic, but Patel and the Congress Old Guard thwarted him. Later in the year Rajaji joined the cabinet, as minister without portfolio. After Patel's death in December 1950 he was asked to take over the crucial job of home minister. Not long afterwards, Rajaji left the cabinet and returned to Madras. The ostensible reason was tiredness but he seems also to have felt that he was not being consulted enough. Anyway, his leaving Delhi was a tragedy, for Jawaharlal Nehru as well as for India. For, as Walter Crocker perceptively remarks in his study of Nehru, after Patel's death the prime minister 'needed the support of an equal. He needed, too, the criticism of an equal.' Now, Rajaji was as close to Gandhi, had sacrificed as much in the freedom movement, and was a man of conspicuous integrity besides. He was indeed

was an aristocrat educated at Harrow and Cambridge, the other a self-made man from small-town South India. They were separated also by a thousand miles of peninsula. In terms of ideology too there were differences: Nehru was more inclined to militant socialist views, Rajaji more oriented towards accommodation with the adversary. But they were united by a shared ideal—the freedom of India—and a shared devotion to the Mahatma. (It was Rajaji whom Gandhi first designated as his successor, later changing his mind in favour of Nehru.) They met at Congress meetings, but did not seem to have been especially intimate. Still, the Tamilian had impressed Nehru enough to have him write in his autobiography of how Rajaji's 'brilliant intellect, selfless character, and penetrating powers of analysis have been a tremendous asset to our cause.'

It was from 1946 that the two men began to work more closely together. In the next eight years, while Nehru was prime minister in New Delhi, Rajaji was, successively, a minister in the Interim Government, governor of Bengal, governor-general of India, minister in the central government, and chief minister of Madras State. In all these jobs he had direct and regular dealings with Nehru.

Official business drew them closer at the personal level as well. The two men shared a cultivated interest in literature and the arts: it was only to Rajaji, and to no other Congressman, that Nehru could write recommending a recent book on the British character by the anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer; or praise the beauty of the folk traditions of India. After a visit to the north-east, the prime minister wrote to his southern colleague about the 'most lovely handloom weaving' he had seen there. He confessed to being 'astonished at the artistry of these so-called tribal people. I think it will be disastrous from many points of view to allow such an industry to fade away.' 'Altogether my visit to these north-eastern areas has been most exhilarating', wrote Nehru to Rajaji, 'I wish they were better known by our people elsewhere in India. We could profit much by that contact.'

Reading the correspondence between these two men, I was deeply moved by the nobility of their vision for a free India. In different ways,

spent the best part of his life-time serving the organization and who owes many honours and kindnesses to it.' He worried that 'as a result of tacit submission on the part of the people of emancipated India, a few good persons at the top, enjoying prestige and power, are acting like guardians of docile children rather than as leaders in a parliamentary democracy.' He went on: 'The long reign of popular favourites, without any significant opposition . . . is probably the main cause for the collapse of independent thinking' in India. But a healthy democracy required 'an Opposition that thinks differently and does not just want more of the same, a group of vigorously thinking citizens which aims at the general welfare, and not one that in order to get more votes from the so-called have-nots, offers more to them than the party in power has given, an Opposition that appeals to reason . . .' Such an opposition, even if it did not succeed in ousting the ruling party, might yet control and humanize it.

A year later, now touching eighty, Rajaji chose a public meeting in Bangalore to launch an all-out attack on the 'megalomaniac' economic and foreign policies of the prime minister. This was followed by the formation in Madras of a new political party, the Swatantra Party. This party focused its criticisms on the 'personality cult' around the prime minister, and on the economic policies of the ruling Congress. In a series of articles published in his journal *Sivaratna*, Rajaji took apart these socialist pretensions. The prime minister's 'personal allergy' towards private enterprise, he commented, was both unwarranted and unfair. For 'it is as patriotic to start and manage a good private business concern, be it in industry or in transport or in distribution, as to be attached to a public managed industry either as an official or propagandist patron-saint.' But Nehru was moved instead by an admiration for Soviet Russia that was 'taking different and various forms at national cost'.

Rajaji also sharply attacked the 'megalomaniac' that vitiates the present development policies'. What India needed, he said, 'is not just big projects, but useful and fruitful projects . . . Big dams are good.

'the intellectual and moral equal of Nehru'. Had a way been found to retain Rajaji in Delhi, this would have, says Crocker, 'ended the situation prevailing in which no one could, or would, stand up to the Prime Minister: the situation whereby he was surrounded by men all of whom owed to him their jobs, whether as Cabinet Ministers or as officials.'

In October 1951, after Rajaji had left Nehru's cabinet to return to Madras, the prime minister sounded him out on the job of Indian high commissioner to the United Kingdom and, when he refused, asked Lord Mountbatten to try and persuade him. Mountbatten duly wrote to Rajaji, and in exchange got a blistering reply.

My career is truly remarkable in its zigzag. . . . Cabinet Minister, Governor without power, Governor-General when the Constitution was to be wound up, Minister without Portfolio, Home Minister and . . . now the proposition is Acting High Commissioner in U.K! Finally I must one day cheerfully accept a senior clerk's place somewhere and raise that job to its proper and honoured importance.

The job Rajaji did accept a few months later was that of chief minister of Madras. He stayed in that post until April 1954, when his party indicated that they wanted K. Kamaraj to replace him. Now Rajaji entered what neither his astrologer nor his own foresight had anticipated, namely, his retirement from politics. He settled down in a small house to spend his days, he said, reading and writing. But, in the end, philosophy and literature proved an inadequate substitute for public affairs. He was moved to comment from time to time on the nuclear arms race between Russia and America, with regard to which he took a line not dissimilar to that of Nehru. Then, when the Second Five Year Plan committed the Government of India to a socialist model of economics, he began commenting on domestic affairs too. Here, however, he came to be increasingly at odds with Nehru.

Consider now an article published by Rajaji in May 1958 under the title 'Wanted: Independent Thinking'. This examined the 'present discontent about the Congress' from the perspective of one who 'has

drama', said Crocker: 'Two figures of Shakespearean scale in contest. And the drama was tragedy, for the contest was needless. Both men were required by India in the two crucial decades following Independence; and both men shared the blame, though perhaps not in equal measure, that there had been fission, not fusion, between them.'

The assessment by Nehru's sister, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, was not dissimilar. She wrote to Rajaji in June 1964: 'It seemed such a bad thing that two men like yourself and Bhai who had contributed so much individually and jointly to our beloved India should be apart at a time of national crisis. But the moment passed and now it is too late.'

This was written weeks after Nehru's death. That event had occasioned a brief obituary published by Rajaji in *Suvarajya*:

Eleven years younger than me, eleven times more important to the nation, eleven hundred times more beloved of the nation, Sri Nehru has suddenly departed from our midst and I remain alive to hear the sad news from Delhi—and bear the shock. . . .

The old guard-room is completely empty now . . . I have been fighting Sri Nehru all these ten years over what I consider faults in public policies. But I knew all along that he alone could get them corrected. No one else would dare do it, and he is gone, leaving me weaker than before in my fight. But fighting apart, a beloved friend is gone, the most civilized person among us all. Not many among us are civilized yet.

God save our people.

These words might serve as an epitaph to the relationship between these two remarkable men. Or one might choose instead the story of Edwina Mountbatten's visit to Madras in early 1953. Told about the visit, Rajaji drew up a punishing programme, whereby Lady Mountbatten would have to visit corporation slums, meet social workers, open a high school, have tea with army wives, see the temples at Mahabalipuram, and dine at the Raj Bhavan. When this schedule was sent back to Delhi it provoked this panic-stricken telegram from the prime minister: 'Programme sent by Mary Clubwalla for Edwina's

but more essential are thousands of small projects which could be and would be executed by the enthusiasm of the local people because they directly and immediately improve their lives.' Speaking more generally, 'the role of the Government should be that of a catalyst in stimulating economic development while individual initiative and enterprise are given fullest play.'

In September 1952, when Rajaji and Nehru were still friends, the American journalist and pioneering Gandhi biographer Louis Fischer wrote to him of his belief that 'some straight talk to the power that is [Nehru], would do a lot of good, for I doubt whether time cures certain diseases. . . . You are the one man who . . . could appeal to his mind. . . .'. At that time, of course, Rajaji was in the Congress; but now, seven years later, Nehru did not take well to criticisms from a colleague-turned-adversary. Sometimes he affected a cavalier attitude—when asked at a press conference about his differences with Rajaji he answered: 'He likes the Old Testament. I like the New Testament.' This was spoken in June 1959, but as the months went by the mood turned very sour indeed. In December 1961 Nehru told a group of newsmen that Rajaji 'stands on a mountain peak by himself. Nobody understands him, nor does he understand anybody. We need not consider him in this connection. All his policies in regard to India, if I may say so, are bad—bad economics, bad sense, and bad temper.' Eighteen months later Nehru claimed that the party Rajaji had started, Swatantra, was 'a mixture of the rottenest ideas imaginable'.

Sensitive observers mourned and worried about the gulf between the two. In May 1959, Rajaji's biographer Monica Felton told him that 'if I were the mother of you and the Prime Minister, I would bang your two heads together and tell you to stop arguing and to settle down and run things together.' Walter Crocker thought their differences real but by no means irreconcilable. Both loved freedom, both were deeply moral beings, and both were passionately committed to social and religious tolerance. Yet they fell out. 'Here was great

people to believe, that the best defence of national existence is to make it clear that they have terrible weapons of retaliation. And this is naturally associated with a policy of armament manufacture to achieve that retaliatory strength and purpose.

He was speaking, of course, of America and Russia then, but he could as well have been speaking of India and Pakistan now.

Rajaji thought the making of atom bombs was the product of hubris, with man believing he 'had the rights and privileges of the sun or even of the Lord God himself.' It was, he remarked, 'an unfortunate day when science lifted the curtain of fundamental matter and trespasses into the greenroom of creation.' Rajaji made a distinction between a 'free science' which honestly documented the radiation effects of nuclear tests, and a 'hired science' which tried to doctor its results. These tests, he said, were 'a wholly illegitimate attack on the health of the present and future generations of the uninvolved millions, who have not yet written off their rights in favour of the nuclear pugilists.'

Rajaji's campaign against nuclear arms culminated in a journey he made to the United Kingdom and the United States in 1962, at the head of a three-member delegation travelling under the auspices of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. (The other members were R.R. Diwakar and B. Shiva Rao.) Rajaji was eighty-three, and this, believe it or not, was his first trip to the West. In America he met, among others, Henry Kissinger; Robert Oppenheimer (the man who had led the Los Alamos team that made the atom bomb, but had later thrown his hat into the peace camp), and the representatives to the United Nations of the Soviet Union and the United States. Rajaji also spoke at several universities and at the prestigious Council of Foreign Relations in New York. All through, he pursued his case against the Bomb with (to quote his biographer, Rajmohan Gandhi) 'the energy of a 40-year-old.'

The highlight of the trip was a meeting with John F. Kennedy, who had set aside twenty-five minutes but was so charmed by Rajaji that in the end they chatted for over an hour. Later, Kennedy told an aide

visit to Madras is rather heavy. She has not been very fit. There is no mention in programme of her visit to you. This is main purpose of her going to Madras.'

This, read intelligently, might even be the most generous compliment ever paid by Nehru to a fellow Indian. If Edwina is to have stimulating conversation in India—Nehru is saying, to Rajaji—and if it is to be with someone other than myself, then it must be only with you.

IV. Rajaji and the Bomb

Mahatma Gandhi once remarked that the atom bomb was 'the greatest sin known to science'. After India exploded a nuclear device in May 1998 and the nation swirled around itself in hysteria, it took a contemporary Gandhian to remember what the Master had said. Thus, the first dissenting article in the national press was written by the veteran architect Laurie Baker, who recalled three tests that an invention of science had to pass in a country such as ours: Is it non-violent? Is it eco-friendly? Is it poverty-reducing? The answers, in the case at hand, were No, No, and No.

India is now a certifiable nuclear power. This would have displeased Gandhi, and also displeased Rajagopalachari, the Gandhian who, in his lifetime, mounted the most sustained campaign against nuclear weapons. In 1945, after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he quipped: 'All this while we knew only of the chemist's bombs. Now we know of bombs made by physicists.' A decade later his tone was deadly serious. Rajmohan Gandhi quotes from a letter written by Rajaji to *The New York Times* at the end of 1954, in which he urged each party in the Cold War not to 'wait for the other', but to unilaterally 'throw all the atomic bombs in the deep Antarctic and begin a new world free from fear.'

In 1959, in a piece directed against nuclear tests, Rajaji wrote in disgust of

politicians and technicians who do not believe in co-existence and mutual trust, but are convinced, and have been doing their best to educate the

Strikingly, Rajaji was against atomic power as well as atomic weapons. When, in 1954, the *Times of India* insisted that nuclear energy was vital to a 'power-starved' India, Rajaji drew their attention to the 'terrible character of the risks necessarily attached' to this industry. Its process of production 'totally disregards the rights of those that do not in any way benefit from the enterprises.' Moreover, 'the general public is almost entirely ignorant of all that the new power source involves. It is not like coal or oil but comparable to a hypothetical case of using the thunderbolt to cook our breakfast.' This was characteristically acute, as well as prescient, for it took another two or three decades before science and society made a proper acquaintance with the risks and costs of nuclear power.

The anti-nuclear movement in India has witnessed the not always comfortable coexistence of Gandhians and Communists. However, after 1998, it has been more or less captured by the Left who, on the one hand, do not question the dangers of nuclear energy and, on the other, seem to think that nuclear weapons are somehow safe if placed in the hands of Red regimes. Rajaji's work has a more general relevance to questions of scientific ethics and nationalist military rivalry, but it also has a more specific relevance to the ethos of the anti-nuclear movement. He once expressed his wish to 'rescue the peace movement from the clutches of the Communist Party.' This is a task that remains unfinished.

that 'seldom have I heard a case presented with such precision, clarity and elegance of language.' He added that the interview had 'a civilizing quality about it.' A diplomat who was present, B.K. Nehru, recalled how 'the secretaries who came in with slips of paper reminding the President of his appointments were shooed away.' Kennedy, it appears, was 'fascinated' by Rajaji.

But Rajaji wasn't entirely sure that the president was convinced. A week later, the journalist Vincent Shean met him in New York and sought to gift him a stamp of Mahatma Gandhi issued just then by the U.S. Postal Department. 'You keep it', said Rajaji to Shean, 'and use it in a letter to Kennedy asking for the renunciation of the atomic bomb.'

After the delegation's return to India, B. Shiva Rao wrote to Jawaharlal Nehru of the impact its leader had made. When Rajaji spoke at the Council of Foreign Relations, the leader of the American delegation to the U.N. Disarmament Conference in Geneva told Shiva Rao: 'Why don't you send this man to represent India at Geneva?' Altogether, Rajaji made 'a deep impression on all the persons he saw in the U.S.A. and England.' He would, Shiva Rao told the prime minister, 'make an admirable representative for India . . . in Geneva.' He was 'extremely able and dignified in his presentation of the case for nuclear disarmament.' Were he indeed to be sent as the government's representative to the talks, it would aid India in playing 'a constructive part in bringing about phased disarmament. . . '.

The suggestion was well meant and well merited. But by this time Nehru and Rajaji were in rival political parties. True, they agreed on the Bomb, but the older man's attacks on his economic and social policies the prime minister found hard to forgive. 'Rajaji is undoubtedly a person of high ability', replied Nehru to Shiva Rao, 'and we all have respect and affection for him. But I doubt very much if he will at all suit or fit in with the Disarmament Conference at Geneva which consists of senior officials. Also, unfortunately, he disagrees with almost everything in the domestic or international sphere for which some of us stand.' Partisan considerations would not allow India to send its best man to Geneva.