

12 JAN 1973

Rajaji — an assessment

By SOL SANDERS

TWO old men have died, almost at the antipodes.

In America, Harry S. Truman, a former President. In India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, a former Governor-General.

Their origins and much of their lives were totally different. But as their deaths came almost on the same day, a comparison comes to mind. For in a very real and important way they were very much alike.

Both typified a certain earthy quality, a fighting instinct, a determination not only not to pass themselves off as something they were not, but an absolute celebration of their origins.

True C.R., or Rajaji as he was known to millions, was a Brahmin aristocrat of South India. He gloried in that: I remember his once asking me, his eyes sparkling with that strange kind of boyish and mischievous delight that was his hallmark, if I were not a Jew. I told him yes. And then, almost conspiratorially, he told me that the Brahmins of South India were sometimes likened to the Jews, in their intellectuality, their successful acquisition of wealth, their exclusiveness.

Caricature

Harry Truman on the contrary was the middle American — as it has come to be called. He was so typical of Missouri-Kansas that made him that sometimes he almost seemed a caricature. But like Rajaji, he too had origins that he was always proud of, that he returned easily to when he left the Presidency and high office. He had a set of virtues and values that were like a good midwestern American meal — hearty, wholesome, and sometimes a little heavy.

There have been a lot of funeral orations, of course. Both had loomed large in the recent history of their nations.

But so much that was written about Rajaji was false and foolish that I would like to add some footnotes.

I read on several occasions that he was head of a "rightist" party. What nonsense! It is true that the Swatantra group he organised was affiliated with big business interests in Bombay and South India. It would also be important to point out that they are the liberal influences in Indian life, that they have stood (like the Tatas in Bombay) for public charities, for fair pricing, for competition. None of these are typical of Indian business. And they certainly are not typical of the Indian "right" — if those kind of sloganistic terms must be used.

But the important thing about Rajaji's political life was that it was intellectually consistent. He never chased slogans, and he never let emotional attachments confuse the reality of the situation. But he could coin a phrase as well as or better than the next — "permit-license raj"; he called Nehru's Congress party rule.

If he was less jingoistic than many of his countrymen in the period leading to independence, it was because he knew that India's

problems would not be solved by independence alone. He broke with Gandhi over resistance to Japanese militarism, and again on the question of partition.

If he became less and less enthusiastic about Jawaharlal Nehru's administration, it was because he had no illusions about world peace. He did not believe it would be maintained by school-marm's lectures to both sides to behave.

And when he opposed "socialism" — that travesty on the whole European movement that has been paraded through India in the past 25 years with all and sundry aboard — it was because he understood that in India's circumstances it would add to a tyranny of power inherent in the long centuries of domination from above.

Yet that did not prevent him from being an idealist. He campaigned against nuclear testing. For while he considered war perhaps inevitable in human life, he felt that nuclear weaponry would mean an end to civilisation. And so he left India for the first time in his life to journey to Washington to talk against nuclear stockpiling, and for whatever concessions might be necessary to make a deal with the other nuclear powers. (I never knew what he thought of Truman, who, whether right or wrong, had given the signal for the first nuclear holocausts toward the end of World War II).

The last time we met, he was extremely pessimistic. He not only felt that India was moving in the wrong direction; he feared that the world society itself was launched on paths which would lead to its own destruction, at least the destruction of its soul.

These were not the concepts of New York cocktail party vedantism, nor obscure Hindu metaphysics (of which he could be a pastmaster). They were very real worries of an old man who had kept his eye on the ball all his life — a man who could break into a complicated political discussion to ask me just how a new gas cigarette lighter worked. But perhaps it is better to let Rajaji speak for himself. Here are some phrases taken from an unpublished conversation he had I conducted just three years ago:

Indian politics

On Indian politics: "I wish there were polarisation of ideology. It is not that...but there won't be a great amount of instability of Government because the tendency in India is to settle down in obedience to Governments. There isn't any spirit of revolt sufficiently strong to create that kind of instability which you are thinking of. Therefore, we will have a stability of poor Government."

Communism in India: "Communism depends on the individual suppressing his individuality. In India, the poorest, the most ill-informed peasant is an individualist. He won't agree to suppress himself. So, when the test comes, the communists will fail."

Gandhi's legacy in India: "Except that they pay homage to his debt and his greatness, there is no substantive improvement today of the people in correlation with his ideals."

They think it is enough to keep his picture and to admire him, to be proud of him. They are entitled to be proud of him. But they have not been able to capture his spirituality incommensurate. That is a very sad confession. But it often happens that way. Buddha, and all the prophets, have suffered like that. Their own people have not followed them."

On world peace: "The world has become smaller now. And the information and the trade and commerce have united all countries of the world so closely that no country can isolate itself, especially a powerful country. Therefore, it is that despite all the opposition that the President of the United States has to face, America continued to aid India and build a part of India and so also it continues to aid other parts of Asia. They can't get out of it. I think, therefore, that through conflicts of all kinds and troubles of all kinds we will get a world Government sometime, not in the very distant future, but in the pretty near future, because the need for it is very urgent. Therefore, it is bound to come quickly. The world Government must come through the influence of a powerful country like America. We can't get it straight away by voting, so to say. A powerful country must get involved in all affairs and then a world Government has to come."

Man's progress

On progress: "We work toward progress, an expansion of good — an extension of good things without limit. Now you have reached a point when you sense that you are advancing too much and we have certain products of expansion which are not pleasant. For instance, industries and population in the cities and the like. Now, what ideas prevailed in India when we were less advanced have now an application and a truth which was not seen before. For instance, Gandhi's objection to industrialisation has a meaning now. Many philosophers in Britain objected to industrialisation. It takes on a meaning now though it then had not much impact on the educated public or the industrial public. Now they see that it is possible to have too many motor cars on the roads. It is possible to have too much smoke in the air. It is possible to have contamination of all our drinks, of all our waters, and so on, so that now you see that evils which were pointed out by some, if I may use a phrase like this, the anti-progress people of the old days. The anti-progress people were speaking the truth we now see in some respects. In what way Indian ideas which are still of the old type have a meaning now for the modern industrial west."

"The meaning comes on account of our being nearer to an earlier stage of advance. It's merely a question of the dimension of progress. If a question were asked of me some years ago — 'Do you see any limit to progress?' I would have said, 'No'. But now I am able to tell you, 'We have a limit to progress'. We will have to stop at a certain point. And there we come back to what Buddha said and what Gandhi said and what the same type of philosophers in Britain said who objected to too much civilisation. Now, this is...you have dragged me to mysticism."



sassoon building, 143, mahatma gandhi road, bombay 1.

January 6, 1973

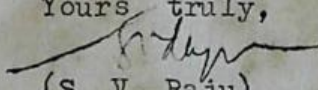
Dear Sir,

For purposes of record and particularly in connection with the forthcoming National Convention, we wish to obtain four copies each of your issue from December 20, when Rajaji was admitted to the hospital, till the 4th of January.

We shall of course be glad to pay the cost involved.

Thanking you,

Yours truly,


(S. V. Raju)

Executive Secretary

The Circulation Manager,

Bombay.
