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RAJAJI: SOME UNTOLD STORIES

no-heart kind that some Tamilians considered him to be, was an intensely humane person, even going out of his way to promote the happiness of his friends.

One also learns of several instances of his ready assistance to the deserving young. He found one young graduate a brilliant mind and promptly advised him to study law, offering to pay his tuition fees. In another such instance, he assisted a youngster through the engineering college. The latter passed with distinction, applied for a job, then came to Rajaji to ask him to speak to some friend of his at the town where he was going for his interview. The old leader arranged for his stay with a friend; and suggested to the youngster to have a look at the daughter of that friend, and come back and report if he liked her! This was Rajaji the marriage-maker at work. The young man got that job, and that girl: Rajaji duly arranged for his marriage with her!

One might round off these Rajajiana with yet another, and revealing, anecdote. This is about the dinner given by film actor Premnath to Rajaji 12 years ago at Bombay.

The story goes that as the old man went up to the door, Premnath's star-wife Bina Rai came forward to invite him in. "SVS" introduced her to Rajaji, noting that she was a film star. Rajaji paused for a long moment, then asked: "Do you mean to say that she is a film actress?" "SVS" said, yes, she was. Rajaji, however, repeated the question, and as they wondered why, he added: "Surely, so much beauty is not required for film-acting!"

he was a prolific writer, as everyone knows: there was an unending flow of articles, short stories, letters to newspapers, and sometimes even poems. He composed a song in English for the singer M. S. Subbulakshmi's United Nations concert. More recently, he composed a satirical poem in Tamil which had DMK men jumping in annoyance. In the past few years, however, he confined himself to brief comments, on a variety of matters, for his column "Dear Reader" in the weekly Swarajya; comments that he dictated daily, without much effort.

There was another, and warmly human side to him that few knew about: his ready aid to deserving students, his quiet, sagacious advice to close friends in all matters including those of the heart (Can you imagine Rajaji playing Cupid!) and his interventions to secure justice for the troubled.

One instance of the last, and a truly untold story, pertained to a danseuse; her patron, a great Tamilian, died suddenly, leaving her penniless; the man's family refused bluntly to part with a paisa for her; and the lady contemplated filing a suit. Rajaji heard of it, and promptly wrote to the great man's son advising him to do the decent thing by the lady, if only for the sake of his father's fair name, and settle a tidy sum upon her. Rajaji's suggestion was accepted. And the lady—now widely recognized and affluent—does not to this day know of Rajaji's intervention in her behalf. He had probably never even met her.

Rajaji intervened likewise to obtain a fair pension from the Union Education Ministry for the original publisher of Poet Bharati's works and a great nationalist, Parai Nallaiyappan. When the latter called to express his gratitude to Rajaji in person, the latter declined to meet him. "I have done nothing and he need not thank me", was his reasoning.

PERHAPS the first thing that the visitor noticed in Mr C. Rajagopalachari's study in his modest house in West Madras was its impeccable cleanliness and order. And its cosiness, created more by the manner of arrangement of its furniture: a charpoy, a long bench parallel to it, a footstool at one end of the charpoy, a reclining chair and two ordinary ones between the bench and charpoy.

On the footstool were a calling bell, an electric torch, his reading glasses and his two small pocket

watches in their still new leather cases. "At no time did the two watches ever agree", notes "SVS", Rajaji's long-time secretary, liaison man, travelling companion and literary consultant, "and he perpetually kept adjusting one with the other!"

Rajaji kept those items on the stool always in one particular, neat order, and he frowned upon

any alteration in that arrangement. The man as amazingly fastidious as his celebrated mind. On the long bench he had, in similar neat, permanent order, his engagement diary, a scribbling pad, two old pens (one of them a vintage Parker), one finely sharpened pencil, a pair of woollen shawls (for him to throw upon his shoulder of a cold evening) and a cotton one. "And he had those shawls folded always in one particular way", says "SVS".

Similar strict order prevailed even in the zip bag and the

that little food with obvious relish. No dish was "nishiddam"—taboo—for him.

He was equally fastidious about his correspondence, dealing with each letter the moment he read it—writing out a reply on one of his famous letter-cards, or dictating to his secretary a longer reply, or throwing it into the waste paper basket when no reply was indicated. Disposal, one way or the other, was instantaneous. In recent years, as his mail grew to unmanageable proportions, his secretary sorted it all out, and placed before him

small "executive" suit case (a gift from Air-India when he went abroad a decade ago), in which Rajaji carried, while travelling, with each little thing in its particular place, a pen knife, a small scissors, a leather belt (or yes, he tied a belt over his dhoti, with characteristic care), and a small packet of toothpicks, besides a roll of bandage and some medicines and vitamin pills.

And, says "SVS" (his full name is S. Venkata Subramaniam, but to everyone including Piloo Mody and Minoo Masani he is only "SVS"), Rajaji even took his daily dose of half a dozen vitamin pills always in a particular order. "He took them about the same time, along with his morning coffee, but always in an unvarying order". None, it seems, dare change that order.

This passion—or peccadillo—had various other personal extensions as well. For instance, he had, at any given time, not less than five or six clean handkerchieves on his person, secret-

only those which called for a reply. And the old leader read it all and dictated his replies on the spot.

He never had any pending work on his hands. "I am all set to leave any moment, should Death call", he used to tell frequently.

In his reading, he had, towards his end, a weakness for fiction, especially for the classics of his youth: novels by Thackeray (within the past year he reread Vanity Fair and several other novels), Dickens (his most recent reading), Trollope, and the like. And latter-day books that had similar quality. He liked, for instance, Pasternak's Dr Zhivago—liked it so much indeed that he made marginal comments, then passed the book to a bosom friend of his in Bangalore to read.

And he was a relatively fast reader, reading as many as 60 quarto pages in an hour: a bit of a record for one of his age.

On the morning newspapers he spent never more than a few

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minutes, scanning headlines and

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ed away in the pockets of his inner vest (an interesting sleeveless, V-necked and front-buttoned affair, with two large side-pockets) and in those of his kurta. Each kerchief had a specific function. "The one that he used for, say, wiping his fingers, was never used to wipe his face!"

And, as you can well imagine, Rajaji took not less than an hour for his bath. Once his bath was over, he insisted on the bathroom being wiped dry and gleaming!

He was not just a careful dresser but a fashionable one. The sleeves of his kurta, for instance, were not baggy as one finds in the average kind, but tapered attractively towards the cuffs. (And he bought his khadi always from the same shop in his native Salem run by an old associate of his.)

Over his food, as with his bath, he took his time, thoroughly munching each morsel before gulping it down. The quantity he ate was little, and during the past two decades, he took only one meal daily, but he ate

minutes, scanning headlines and digesting the opening summaries, leaving it to his secretaries (two, besides "SVS") to bring to his notice whatever deserved detailed attention. They also read out to him choice items from New Delhi dailies—items on matters of interest to him.

Characteristically, he had no library of his own, limiting himself to just a few indispensable reference books: an Oxford English dictionary (not the large one, but the more common quarto edition), a Sanskrit-English dictionary, a small encyclopaedia, the Bible and the Valmiki Ramayan. (He was a reckonable scholar in Sanskrit as he was in English and Tamil.) Those books were, to be sure, kept in an unchanging arrangement.

Whatever he wanted to read he borrowed. During Dr Radhakrishnan's Presidency, Rajaji borrowed from Rashtrapati Bhavan its entire Thackeray set. When he read an author, he read not one book but the complete set of his works.

In his sixties and seventies and even up to his middle eighties,

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Tamil Nadu knows of one celebrated intervention by Rajaji to bring off the marriage of one of his closest friends with a young lady decades his junior. In another instance, he persuaded a friend of his, a widower, to marry the young lady who was then that friend's close companion: give her the status of a wife, he advised. The advice, needless to say, was accepted. One now learns of several such instances: Rajaji, far from being the all-mind-and