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Rajaji—the ideal patient

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RAJAJI as a patient was what any conscientious doctor can ask for: obedient, cheerful, preferring preventive medicine, and never impatient.

"Today's complaint, doctor, is that there is no complaint.... you asked me how I am: I am very happy," Rajaji used to say to Dr. C. Satyanarayana who attended on him during the last 16 years.

"His self-confidence and the perfect code he observed in his life seem to me to be the reasons for the long span of life Rajaji enjoyed. He was mentally completely agile till a week before he was admitted to the General Hospital. He was a sadhaka," Dr. Satyanarayana said.

The doctor had known Rajaji's diseases, and his own cures for them. He was an asthma patient for years. Practically from the start of his life he seemed to have had myopia.

Before the age of ten, when he got his glasses, Rajaji could see nothing clearly at any distance. Everything was a green patch, he had told Dr. Satyanarayana.

His father had taken him to an eye specialist at Bangalore. Then he got the thrill of his life. With his glasses he could see nature's glory in all its splendour "the different leaves, with the shape of each leaf."

Somewhere in his '40s, he seems to have contracted asthma. He was a great believer in preventives. An asthma patient is a complicated medical subject. But Rajaji had found his own cure: coffee so hot that it was almost liquid fire gave him relief. Many knew about this

"medical habit" of Rajaji.

Thanks to the religiously observed morning walk, Rajaji kept many diseases away. But he did not fear treatment. At 88, because of a strangulation he had to be operated on for hernia. Dr. A. S. Ramakrishnan did the operation at his Egmore nursing home. Rajaji, already a frail man, stood it well.

About eight months ago, Rajaji had a fall in the bathroom. There was a contusion in his thigh bone. He was then 93. A team of doctors helped him walk again. Thanks to his own confidence and punctuality Rajaji could resume his morning walks.

Rajaji never ignored even small troubles. In fact, that is how Dr. Satyanarayana came into touch with Rajaji and later became his personal physician. Rajaji described Dr. Satyanarayana after his American visit as his "friend, philosopher, guardian, doctor and nurse."

In the late 50s, Khasa Subba Rao asked Dr. Satyanarayana on a December day to go and attend on Rajaji for a throat ailment.

"I do not know Rajaji. I have not been asked to come and treat him. If Rajaji wants me he will send round a big car," he told Khasa.

One day a big car from Rajaji was at Dr. Satyanarayana's place. The doctor went to him and found him fasting for some reason. He had to administer mild doses of medicine.

A week after Rajaji came to Dr. Satyanarayana's house in Kilpauk without notice around 1 p.m., and announced to Mrs. Satyanarayana: "I am C. Raja-

gopalachari. I want to see the doctor. When is he expected?"

Told that the doctor would come home for lunch at around 1-30 p.m., he said "I will wait."

When Dr. Satyanarayana came Rajaji told him: "I just wanted to come in and tell you I am now all right. You gave me infant doses of the medicine. As the best patient, I had to obey the orders of the greatest doctor."

The friendship between the doctor and the patient continued. Whenever Rajaji had any trouble Dr. Satyanarayana had to be consulted.

Two years ago, Dr. Satyanarayana was presiding over the Indian Association of Speech and Hearing at Banaras when Rajaji had a setback in his fluid system. The doctor was summoned, and he came.

Rajaji ate very little food and took a few vitamin tablets which kept him well. When ill he used to say: "I am a freak of nature, doctor. I will be all right soon."

Dr. Satyanarayana accompanied Rajaji on his American trip. Rajaji was then 83. He was keen on pleading with the Heads of States in the West to stop nuclear tests. He had to take his personal physician with him. But there was a problem. The doctor should spend from his own pocket.

So he told Dr. Satyanarayana: "I am afraid I will not be able to fulfil this cherished mission of mine. Who will accompany me at his own cost?" Dr. Satyanarayana said he would.

Rajaji had another condition: "You will have to be on earned leave." Of course, the Tamil Nadu Government was happy to send Dr. Satyanarayana on the mission. And the Gandhi Peace Foundation paid the doctor's fare as desired by the Prime Minister.

President Kennedy told Dr. Satyanarayana: "You have a very great responsibility, you have to be very careful."