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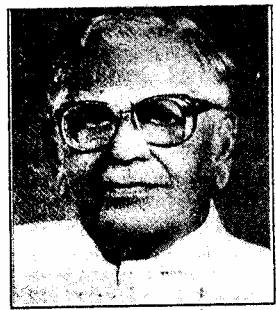
From the Bhavan's President
The Maxim Rajaji Taught Me

R. Venkataraman

I admired his logical mind and inwardly prayed
 that I may have at least a fraction of that genius.

Fifty-five years ago, sheer luck provided me an opportunity to carry out one or two assignments from Rajaji.

In the 'Random Notes', I have kept of those days, I had noted "razor sharp precision", "hard task master" and "generous and benevolent in praise". Each of these expressions represented my reactions to either what he said or did during those days I worked on the particular task.



like wild fire throughout the four corners of our Motherland. Strikes and hartals paralysed the Nation, trains were derailed and communications disrupted. Destruction of life and property, arson and looting was resorted to as a symbol of patriotic protest. The raid on Arumuganeri Salt Factory was part of the Freedom Struggle. As a consequence of the tragic events, two young men,

Rajagopalan and Kasirajan were awarded extreme penalty of death together with heavy penalties on others for varying terms of imprisonment. An appeal to the Federal Court and several mercy petitions to the Governor and Viceroy having

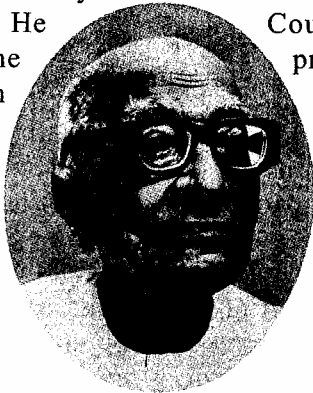
Following the arrest of National Leaders in August 1942, a storm of violent protest burst over the country. 'Quit India' the magic slogan spread

failed, a date for execution had been fixed early in October, 1945.

'Kittoo' Sri Venkatakrishnan of Tuticorin became my close friend during our detention in Vellore and Tanjore jails during the 1942 movement.

Our mutual involvement in Trade Union Movement and harmony of views drew us nearer and had kept us together ever since. He had appealed to Gandhiji for succour to the condemned youths and had been directed by Gandhiji to meet Rajaji.

Rajaji's hostility to the 1942 movement and to the violence that erupted in the country were well known. He had condemned the violent outbreak in harsh and bitter language. Would he come forward to help these prisoners? Would it compromise his views? These and a hundred other doubts assailed



C. Rajagopalachari

those interested in the case.

I realised later that it was essentially the human aspect that persuaded Rajaji to take up the cause of the young men. In disposing of the appeal to the Federal Court, Justice Sir Shri S. Varadachariar had expressed doubts on the propriety of the sentence of extreme penalty on one of the prisoners (Rajagopalan) and Rajaji was not convinced of the sentence in the case.

But he was sceptical of achieving anything with barely ten days left before the fateful day. I advised Kittoo who consulted me that the Privy Council was still the highest Court of Appeal, that proof of filing of an appeal in cases of death penalty would automatically stay execution till disposal of appeal and that the opportunity to gain time should not be missed. He was

kept that I should convince Rajaji about the feasibility of the course of action.

I can never forget my first interview with Rajaji in 60, Bazullah Road, T. Nagar. He was seated on a quilt on the floor clad in spotless white khadi, looking fresh as one coming from a bath.

There was serenity and calmness all around and people moved and talked noiselessly. He eyed me with kindness, heard me with patience and perhaps sensing my nervousness, put me at ease with occasional nod of approbation. Then followed a grilling cross-examination on the solicitors with whom I had contact in London, the time needed for preparation of papers, the proof that should be furnished to the Home Secretary and so on.

In the end, he had elicited a rough time-table for getting papers ready, buying Demand Draft from the Chartered Bank, dispatching documents to London Solicitors, presenting documented evidence of

preparing appeal to the Home Secretary and obtaining orders for stay. Then he confronted me that if the schedule was kept rigorously up, I would be able to present papers to the Home Secretary only a day before the final date and that, if by any chance there was a delay, the whole thing would end in a fiasco.

I admired his logical mind and inwardly prayed that I may have at least a fraction of that genius.

I steeled myself to assure him that there would be no slip or let up. I did not feel that he was convinced but nevertheless he asked me to start work on the appeal immediately. Apparently, he also consulted the late Sri B. Jagannatha Das, for the cheque for the expenses was drawn in his name.

Thereafter, I met him almost everyday in the morning and reported progress. Sri S. Krishnamoorthi, Advocate, who later became the Mayor of Madras, was also associated with me in this work and he

posted Rajaji with day-to-day details. We raced against time, completed the formalities and filed the evidence of presentation of appeal to Privy Council to the Home Secretary on the day before the final date, secured stay orders, communicated it to the Jail Superintendent of Madurai, took the extra precaution of alerting the veteran Congress leader of Madurai, Sri A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, informed the Press, etc., but failed to report to Rajaji in the stress and strain of the last day.

When I returned home late in the evening, there was, in my house, a handwritten note from Rajaji which, after referring to my lavish promises, took me to task for not reporting the result even if it were unfavourable.

I was feeling miserable that I had failed in my duty. It was then that I must have entered in my 'Random Notes—Hard Task Master'.

By the time I met him the next morning, the news of the stay of execution had appeared in the newspapers and Rajaji was

naturally delighted.

He praised me warmly for the work done. It was out of proportion to the comparatively routine work I had done. He did not spare me also for my lapse in not reporting to him. The reproof was milder than I expected.

But all these took only few seconds. Rajaji was a model of systematic work.

He immediately asked me to prepare estimates for pursuing the appeal before the Privy Council, choice of Counsel to be engaged and settled on that renowned lawyer and friend of India Mr. D. N. Pritt. An appeal for funds issued by Rajaji brought generous response and the sailing appeared smooth.

Our complacency was rudely disturbed when the Government of India, upset by the delaying tactics resorted to on behalf of the prisoners, moved the Privy Council for striking out the appeal as unsustainable and eventually succeeded in securing its dismissal.

With the funds left over and

substantial part of the fees generously refunded by Mr. D. N. Pritt, Rajaji thoughtfully provided for the benefit of the aged mothers of the condemned youths.

But he did not give up his further attempts to secure clemency for the boys. The draft I prepared after the dismissal of the appeal reflected my gloom and did not meet the approval of Rajaji.

Instead he asked me to go over the whole case as if it were a fresh petition, laying emphasis again on Justice Varadachariar's

observations. "Our endeavour should be perfect", he added raising his head towards me. I have since then carried it as the motto of my life.

Events moved quickly thereafter. The war ended and negotiations for Interim Government were set afoot. The political climate changed and the youngmen were first reprieved and later released by the National Government.

It was indeed Rajaji's earnest, perfect endeavour that saved the lives of two patriotic youths.

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