

Lady behind the genius

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remembers Lady Raman, wife of C V Raman, who was a great personality by herself.

After reading a couple of articles on C V Raman in *Deccan Herald*, I thought it would be a good idea to remember his wife Lady Lokasundari Raman. As the well known saying goes, 'Behind every great man there is a woman!' He used to call her 'Logum' but always referred to her in public as 'Lady Raman'.

Here I quote from the first Raman Memorial Lecture held in 1978 at the Indian Institute of Science. It was given by Prof S Ramaseshan.

"Against all conventions of the time, Raman arranged his own marriage with Lokasundari, who was then 13 years old. The story is that on the first occasion he saw her; she was playing on the veena the 'Thyagaraja Keerthana', *Rama Ni Samanam Evaro*. We shall never know whether it was by intent or by accident! Anyway, she insists that she still does not know if Raman married her for the extra Rs 150 the Finance Department gave to its married officers! He had joined the Finance Department as Assistant Accountant General, Calcutta. He was then 18 1/2 years old."

What a hectic life it must have been for her to be married to a whirlwind personality like Raman! Young Lokasundari tells of the routine of her husband: At 5.30 am, he goes to the the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, returns at 9.45 am, bathes, gulps down his food, leaves for the office by taxi so as not to be late. On his way back in the evening, he goes to the association to continue his scientific work and returns at 10 pm. Sundays were spent at the association.

Raman gave up his lucrative job in the Finance Department and accepted the Palit Chair at the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science for a much lower salary. It must have been a very difficult time for her, as Raman had already taken on a few students for his research and many of them were staying with them. She never talked of any financial constraints at that time to me, except, laughingly, told me of how some of the students had long and thick *kudumis* (tufts of hair) and how she had to comb them to remove lice!

In 1930, she visited Sweden along with her husband where he received the Nobel Prize. What a great and extraordinary event in her life! I actually came to know her very intimately in 1950. I have seen a picture of her in a grand green silk sari, just for the occasion. I mention this because she was always dressed in an ordinary sari that had no grandeur in it. In fact she looked so unpretentious that people would often ask me if that was the wife of Sir Raman. She could have had anything in the world but she was never enamoured of wealth.

I found this very interesting picture of Lady Raman and Kasturba Gandhi taken in Nandi Hills in 1936, when Mahatma Gandhi visited Sir Raman in the Indian Institute of Science. I remember asking her about this meeting. She said that Kasturba was a very quiet person. She had met her in the guest house – now Kumara Krupa where they had all done some spinning on the charka. They along with their son Radhakrishnan, who was 7 years old, drove the Gandhis in their



Dr C V Raman and wife Lokasundari Raman.

'Minerva' car to Nandi. Lady Raman also said that the car was borrowed by the 'Air Raid Precaution Group' for practice when the Second World War started in 1939. The car was returned to Sir Raman after a few years.

She was rather candid in giving her opinions. Once I remember Raman asking her for her opinion about a public scientific lecture he had given. She was quite outspoken and said that it was a very stupid lecture. Raman turned to my husband and said, 'She is a very severe critic you know.'

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PROF S RAMASESHAN

She had a soft corner for animals. She always had Tommy, her dog, in her garden even during her last days. She once brought home an abandoned squirrel and gave it to my daughter Tara to take care of. But her greatest achievement lies in saving a cow. Lady Raman had had a fall and she had a hairline fracture in her spine. The doctor packed her between two pillows and asked her to remain in bed for three months. A nurse was appointed to look after her. About this time, her *mali* (gardener) Muddha brought a very sick cow and its calf from her estate in Kengeri. With the help of a few men, the cow was put down near her bedroom. It was so weak that it fell down flat on its stomach with its four legs splayed out in all four sides. It was a most dreadful sight. A veterinarian was summoned. He went around the cow with his hands behind his back and pronounced that since the cow had fallen down flat, it would not survive. Saying this he left.

Lady Raman literally rose to the occasion! With the help of the nurse she sat close to the sick cow. She ordered a few yards of strong rope to be bought. A few *malis* lifted the cow and several rounds of rope went under its stomach. She then asked them to hoist the rope up and tie it to a branch of the tree. Now it was sort of suspended with its legs hanging down.

She bought some jaggery, powdered it and mixed all her own vitamin tablets in it. She added a few

tablets of Crocin and Digene as well! These were made into balls and the *malis* with great effort opened the cow's mouth and thrust the entire mix in it. A very difficult operation. The cow looked most pathetic with its eyes half closed. It was a very tense situation. Then she asked the vet to come and ordered him to give a saline drip to the cow. Suddenly, after a couple of hours there was a little twitch in the left ear of the cow. An hour later, the cow started chewing the cud. The vet was so excited and said, "Oh the cow will live!" Lady Raman gave him a stern look and said, "You may go!"

At this point Lady Raman who had been sitting for so many hours, collapsed. She was rushed to her room and given a saline drip as well! The next morning I congratulated her on her tremendous effort to save the cow in spite of her own illness. She smiled and said, "I was there when the cow was born and have played with it when she was a calf." The next statement was a surprise to me. "Yesterday, as well as being Friday, was also my son's birthday. There was no way I was going to allow this cow to die!" She was about 80 years old then.

During the wartime, Lady Raman helped some people especially women and children who had fled from Burma. She gave them protection and fed and housed them.

She was the President of Bharat Scouts and Guides (North District) Bangalore, as well as the Founder President of the well known Seva Sadan which started in the year 1935. She was also associated with the Red Cross. Nobody can forget her dedication to the upliftment of women and children. Lady Raman founded the Mysore State Council for Child Welfare in 1955. She was nominated as the President of this council in the same year. This council became the Karnataka State Council for Child Welfare in 1973. In 1955, she started a school for the under privileged in her house 'Panchavati' in Malleshwaram. One could always see the garden full of children playing and attending classes under the trees. There was even a children's library. Very often when people enquired after her, Raman would proudly answer, "Oh! She is very busy with the young children in the garden."

The result of her vision still continues in the great and devoted work that is going on in the Karnataka State Council for Child Welfare. Lady Raman would have been very proud of them.