

Raman's Humour

Raman was rarely seen minus his familiar turban. He was once questioned as to the regularity of its presence on his head. "Why, to prevent the head from swelling", he promptly quipped.

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Raman was equally famous for his ego. In early 1907 after passing the M.A. examination with flying colours, he appeared for the Final Civil Service, which is the forerunner of today's IAS. After returning from the interview Raman said to his brother, "I took one look at the faces of all the fellows who had come for the interview, and I knew I was going to stand first!" Raman duly stood first in the FCS examination.

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On one occasion when he was provoked by a newspaper reporter, he said pointing towards the Raman Research Institute set up by him, "This Institute is a monument to my egotism. I am an egotist and just as the Egyptian Kings used to build pyramids before their death, so is this Institute my pyramid".

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He was one of those courageous men who did not hesitate to call 'a spade, a spade'. If he felt that the approach to a problem was wrong, he bluntly said so. In a function organised on the occasion of his 80th birthday speaker after speaker extolled his science. When it came to Raman's turn to reply to the felicitations, he remarked, "I wish someone had said that I had the heart of a lion".

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Once while returning to India from abroad Raman was deeply attracted by the intense blue of the Mediterranean Sea. It was there he began his studies on the scattering of light by liquids. In fact, Raman started his investigations right on the ship using polarizers, a small prism and a pocket spectroscope which he always carried with him. And he wrote two papers for *Nature* on board the ship S.S. Narkuda, one of which he mailed from Aden and the other from Bombay harbour. Perhaps the first instance of papers being written on a ship.

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Raman once introduced one Dr Rahm to Mahatma Gandhi. Dr Rahm was a Swis Scientist who was studying the tiny organisms known as Tardigrada which survived even when held at very low temperatures. Dr Rahm after paying his respects to Gandhiji asked him if there was no way of ending the conflicts so rampant in the world. "If we cannot unite, can't we fight atheism which seems to be so much on the increase?" he asked.

Sir C.V. Raman put in : "I shall answer your question. If there is a God we must look for him in the universe. If he is not there, He is not worth looking for. I am being looked upon in various quarters as an atheist but I am not. The growing discoveries in the science of astronomy and

physics seem to me to be further revelations of God. Mahatmaji, religions cannot unite. Science offers the best opportunity for a complete fellowship. All men of Science are brothers".

"What about the converse? All who are not men of science are not brothers?" Gandhiji asked.

The distinguished physicist saw the joke and said "But all can become men of Science".

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On an occasion when introduced to a gathering as having been born in 1888, Sir C.V. Raman remarked wryly: "And now I have been introduced to you as a hang-over from the 19th century".

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Raman was known for his brisk habits and almost irrepressible energy. Once as Deputy Accountant General he was transferred to Rangoon. One day an Accountant General who went round on a tour of inspection, was so much struck by Raman's aggressive individuality that he asked his superior. "How do you manage Raman?"

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On another occasion Dr. King of the Benares Hindu University being struck by the marvellous energy of Raman's movements was forced to remark, "It is indeed a matter of surprise that flasks and test-tubes survive Mr. Raman's handling in the laboratory".

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He was very fond of gardening and trees in particular. Once just before his last birthday he was taken ill. He spent a short while in St. Martha's nursing home, but wished to be taken back to his residence. Lying on the bed in his house he complained, "If I knew I was going to die here like this, I would have had the windows put in differently".

When asked what he meant, he said. "I can't see my trees!" And so the bed was raised so that he could feast his eyes.

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Raman always took pride in the fact that his researches never involved costly equipment. Raman discovered the Raman Effect with the crudest of instruments, namely a mercury lamp, a flask of benzene and a direct vision pocket spectroscope! On one occasion, Raman is said to have remarked : "The essence of Science is independent thinking, hard work and not equipment. When I got my Nobel Prize I had spent hardly Rs 200/- on my equipment."

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Excerpted from *Professor Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman* by S. Bhagavantam, Andhra Pradesh Akademi of Sciences, Hyderabad. and lecture delivered by Dr. G.Venkataraman, J.N. Fellow, Indira Gandhi Reactor Research Centre by Hasan Jawaid Khan