

## CAN HE EXCEL HIMSELF?

It is hard to believe that our dear C. S. is now sixty three. To me he represents the vigour, vitality and boldness of youth, his handsome face set in a smile which reveals his genial friendship and wide humanity and conceals the cares and concerns of high office.

His friends and critics, admirers and opponents, consider him a politician, administrator, planner, conciliator, minister for finance, steel, agriculture, food, education, science and technology, a party chief, adviser, confidant and co-ordinator but to me he stands out as the creator of Matscience thereby initiating an intellectual and scientific renaissance the consequences of which cannot be easily envisaged or estimated at the present time.

It was during the momentous days of the Constituent Assembly when my great father was playing a

primary role as one of the principal architects of the Indian constitution that I first saw C.S. who came to Delhi as a young aspirant to a political career. At that time the Indian National Congress symbolized the hopes, dreams and yearnings of half a billion people and the atmosphere was charged with triumph and jubilation over our new-won freedom. It looked as if no better moment could be chosen by an ambitious youth for entry into politics. India enjoyed the prestige and fruits of Allied victory without having gone through the trials and terrors of a titanic world war. The British conquerors who bombed and blasted their way into Berlin, withdrew without a single shot from India before the moral pressure from a frail peasant-loving saint, Mahatma Gandhi and his princely heir Jawaharlal Nehru. It looked as if it was just the right tide in the affairs of a politician, if taken at the crest could carry him along

**Alladi Ramakrishnan**

Director, Matscience, Madras, India.

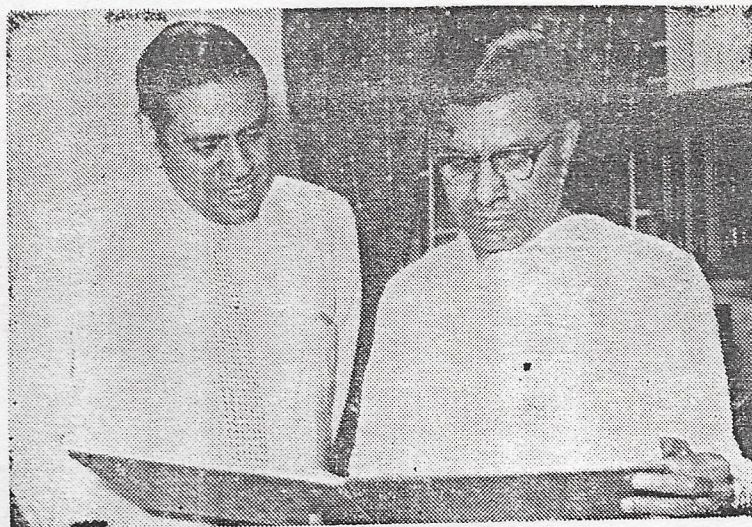


the democratic surges into the coveted seats of power and prestige.

C. S. entered the domain of Indian politics when there was just one party, the Indian National Congress and one leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, and one objective, to work the new Indian Constitution. Very soon C. S. found himself the finance and education minister of the progressive and enlightened province of Tamil Nadu.

However during the two decades that followed the wake of freedom, the hopes of a millennium had vanished, our economic progress was too modest and tardy, leading inevitably to disillusionment and despair. While America swept forward into the decade of space exploration and Germany achieved an economic miracle with Japan following close on its affluent heels, India settled down to a state of economic stagnation under the opiate influence of foreign aid and collaboration.

The life of the technologist and the scientist in India was nothing but dull routine. Universities offered ill-paid jobs with almost no contact with the live movements of industrial and economic growth and development.



C. S. With Alladi Ramakrishnan

However chance and circumstance provided me with opportunities for frequent travel to centres of learning in Europe and America, Australia and Japan. I was thrilled to distraction by the excitement of scientific life at these centres and dulled to frustration by the weary, stale and unprofitable state of affairs in Indian Universities. I dreamed of a haven of learning like the Yukawa Hall in Kyoto and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, amidst the harsh realities of the educational scene in our country. My mind swayed between reality and idealism, fact and fancy, vision and despair.

While I reconciled myself to a hopeless situation I still waited and watched for something to happen. And it happened one day as miracles do without the

slightest premonition or forewarning.

I was invited to an international gathering of students in which Subramaniam as the state minister was the chief guest. I was not inclined to attend the function for I felt there was little or no interest at high Government level in advanced mathematical sciences. I was driving to the beach when my wife, perhaps with feminine intuition, suggested that we could spend a few minutes at the function in response to the invitation from organisers. To my surprise I was asked to speak on the vexed problem of racial discrimination. With intrepid enthusiasm, I asserted that a sense of inferiority is essentially a state of the mind and the problem is aggravated because the oppressed people attach too much



importance to the opinion of the oppressors. For some reason C.S. was impressed by this unconventional approach to an age-old problem and he invited me to his official residence. Later he came to dinner at Ekamra Nivas - my family home where he met the band of eager aspirants to careers in theoretical physics.

It puzzled me beyond comprehension to find the Minister who must be more concerned with building dams and bridges, getting interested in the development of mathematical research. I felt a trifle guilty that I had inveigled him into this domain which had intoxicated me and my associates beyond reason. Soon I realised that it became almost a faith with him, a faith which was strengthened by his visit to the United States where he met my colleague Dr. Vasudevan at the Rand Corporation in California. He returned with the conviction that creative science needed the noble heat of youthful ambition and not the tepid caution of unfeeling mediocrity. He proceeded to take steps for the creation of an Institute for Advanced Learning and before doing so he was anxious to have the blessings and active support of our Prime

Minister. It occurred to me in a discussion with my esteemed and genial friend Dr. M.M. Shapiro that all the students associated with me should be introduced to the Prime Minister during his visit to Madras.

In spite of a crowded series of official engagements for the Prime Minister, it was found possible by Subramaniam to arrange an interview at the Raj Bhavan after an official dinner, to which my wife and I were invited to have a preliminary occasion to meet the Prime Minister. I need hardly describe my trepidation and anxiety, for so much was to depend upon a few minutes conversation — almost the dreams and aspirations of a whole scientific community hung on the smiling lips of our Prime Minister. Ten minutes before the close of dinner, he summoned me and all the students gathered to have a personal interview with him. It was a strange feeling for me to do all the talking with a man who held almost unquestioned sway over the destinies of our country. At the end he asked only me one question: "Are you really convinced that we should have an Institute of the kind you are insisting upon?" I naturally said 'Yes' with all the emphasis at my

command and he just smiled.

Two months later, Subramaniam decided to obtain the formal assent of the Prime Minister. We waited with bated breath at the Madras airport as Subramaniam came across the tarmac and said with his inevitable smile. "He is going to be our patron". Later on, he recounted to us what a miracle it was to succeed in directing the attention of the Prime Minister to this question. It was the day on which the decision for military action in Goa was being taken that the Prime Minister agreed to be the patron of the Institute.

Ten years have rolled by since the birth of our Institute. To-day Subramaniam is invested with opportunities unlimited as the cabinet minister for planning and scientific research. He has at his disposal teeming resources, made available to him by the most powerful Prime Minister of the most populous nation in the ranged democratic world. With his happy blend of pragmatism and imagination he is sure to achieve a great deal but it will be hard to excel himself as the creator of Matscience. I wish and pray he will.

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