

A PRESCIENT ESTIMATE

It was fortunate that I met the venerable K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar at a social function when he reminisced on an article he wrote on my father in 1932. It reads like a paanygeric by an ardent admirer. But it turned out to be a prescient estimate of a legal genius who became one of the founding fathers of the republican constitution of the world's most populous democracy,

In that essay Mr. Iyengar did not (and could not) anticipate the freedom of India which came just fifteen yeurs later and the consequent role of my father in drafting its new constitution. But he was able to visualise the magnitude of the achievements to come as later described in the "Work of Art" of Seshachalapathi and the "Perfect Portrait" by Rajagopala Iyengar.

I am grateful to Mr. Srinivasa Iyengar for allowing the Alladi Centenary Foundation to reprint the article for circulation among those in the present generation interested in my father's life and work.

ALLADI RAMAKRISHNAN
15th July 1989

Editor's Note

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (1908-1999) was a noted Indian writer of English. He served as the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University during 1966-68, and subsequently as the Vice-President of the Sahitya Academy during 1969-77. This article was written soon after Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer was knighted in 1932.

Krishnaswami Alladi

DEWAN BAHADUR SIR ALLADI KRISHNASWAMI IYER, Kt.*

A SKETCH

by *Mr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar*

A nice question is occasionally asked during the familiarity of a private conversation: Is Sir Alladi a Tamil or an Andhra? It may not matter much how you finally answer it.** His present eminence as a lawyer and his unquestioned greatness as a man have made the Tamils (like those of the cities of ancient Greece who all claimed Homer as their own) attempt to add Sir Alladi also to the splendid galaxy of their heroes - Sir V. Bhashyam Iyengar, Dr. S. Subramanya Iyer, V. Krishnaswami Iyer, Sir P. S. Sivaswami Iyer, Sir K. Srinivasa Iyengar, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer, S. Varadachariar, T. R. Venkatarama Sastri - that is quite a formidable enough an enumeration on the legal side, and an extraordinarily distinguished one. Even then Sir Alladi is too good to be surrendered to the Andhras, without at least a protest.

But Andhra or Tamil, it is indisputable that Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer is an intellectual force in Madras. He is a power, he is a potent influence, he is almost a personality. 'Personality', indeed, is too misunderstood a term to be lightly used here, without a qualification. In personal appearance, Sir Alladi is anything but imperious, domineering or colossal. One could mistake him, on a superficial external survey, for a very ordinary person. But in the evaluation of a human personality, the mere external aspect - the simple physical stature and symmetry of limbs - counts as a most unimportant factor. Watch Sir Alladi rather in the vivid animation of an argument in process in the gorgeous environment of the High Court; the spasmodic articulations, the pertinent gestures, the guttural accents incredibly galvanised into a gymnastic fired into a superior life, the queer subtleties and delicacies of law shaped on the anvil of cogent case-law; the fairly even flow of argument struggling amidst the zigzags of the opponent's interruptions and the judge's interpellations; the whole court hall, seniors and juniors, apprentices and clerks, truant law students and vagrant journalists, witnesses with troubled conscience and litigants with uncertain expectations, the whole motley crowd, half understanding, half thrilled with a sense of the exotic, and so standing, as if petrified by magic; and Sir Alladi, with his small head and loose gown, the left hand carefully supporting the massive part of a bulky volume and the fingers of the right hand somehow expressively busy, and the cataract of words sounding impetuously, at times even explosively - and now the true observer has some materials to picture Sir Alladi's personality as it radiates its influence in the High Court buildings and sheds its reflected glory on the horizon of law.

Yet that is not - cannot be - the whole of Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer. The gown of the Advocate is a dazzling, enviable emblem. It brings, to the chosen few, an ample fortune; and it brings fame and power as a matter of course. But the essence of man, the universal intuitional man, is too slippery an entity and ever eludes the rather cumbrous

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* Federated India, 26th October '32.

**He was a Tamil 'Brahacharanam' Brahmin whose ancestors had settled in the Nellore District a few hundred years ago. Hence he had the suffix 'Iyer' attached to his name and in some circles he was known as Sir A. K. Iyer.

grasp of mere intellectual emblems. Sir Alladi, the devoted friend of the poor - of whom he was and whose kinship with himself not all his present opulence would make him forget - Sir Alladi, the passionate student of the humanities, the connoisseur of Art, who would gladly catch in between arid professional hours, like a chance shower in the sunshine, the fugitive, yet fascinating rainbow magnificence of pure Art and matters - Sir Alladi, the patron of learning and scholarship, who has endowed the Sundara Iyer - Krishnaswami Iyer lectures in the Madras University and another for original research in the Andhra University, who has liberally helped the Mylapore Sanskrit College and the Ramakrishna Student's Home, and who has delivered one of the most inspiring of Convocation Addresses, reminiscent of Sir T. Muthusami Iyer and Sir V. Bhashyam Iyengar, - Sir Alladi, the casual, careless talker, unreserved and unrestrained, on the Marina or in the club Cosmopolitan or across a dinner table: these significant phenomena must one take into account also, if one would correctly evaluate the personality of our Advocate General.

He is forty-seven now. Honours have come thick upon him comparatively early in life. In quick succession he got the Kaiser-i-Hind medal, the Dewan Bahadur and the Knighthood. But apparently he was by no means a precocious boy or youth. While presiding over a prize distribution function, he told the Madras Christian College students, that he had never been a prizeman himself. He fulfilled the truth of Lytton Strachey's dictum : "A genius at school is usually a disappointing figure." On the other hand, neither was Sir Alladi successful at the Bar from the very outset of his career. Called to the Bar as early as 1907 after a period of apprenticeship under the late P. R. Sundara Iyer, it was not until the early and middle twenties that he reached the foremost position in the Bar. Sir K. Srinivasa Iyengar dead, Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer devoted to the Executive, Mr. S. Srinivasa Iyengar busy over Corporation elections or All-India Swarajist activities, and Mr. Rangachariar thundering in Delhi and Simla or chanting Oriental benedictions at Canberra, the moment was opportune for Alladi's emergence. With him emerged too, from semi-obscurity, Mr. S. Varadachariar. And now though things have slightly changed, Sir Alladi hasn't felt the need to sound a retrace. He is still there, de Jure and de facto our Advocate-General.

To say that Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer came to the vanguard of Madras lawyers in the early and middle twenties is not to imply that before he was an unknown or a negligible quantity. As a matter of fact, he has been an enfant terrible all along. He defeated at a very young age the even then redoubtable Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri in an election to the Senate of the Madras University. He has been in the Syndicate and on the M. L. Board of examiners. Later, he very nearly unseated the late Raja of Panagal, then the Chief Minister, in the sensational Council elections of 1926. The truth of the matter is that granted his intelligence and industry, the cooksureness and assertiveness of his advocacy, and the affability and honesty of his movements, this brilliant junior of the late P. R. Sundara Aiyar was clearly a marked man from the beginning. His successes and honours have admirably become him. They have not taken us by surprise and he has given no room for disappointment, or airy might-have-beens. What he is, is by right and virtue of his intellectual and social qualities. With disarming candour and affection, he greets the youngest junior and the absolute stranger. The man is even greater than the lawyer.

The conferment of a Knighthood on Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer on New Year's Day

was in a way a special distinction. Unlike as in Bengal, Madras Advocate Generals had till then never went beyond the C. I. E. - not S. Srinivasa Iyengar, not T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, not C. P. Ramaswami Iyer himself. For the first time, an Advocate-General of the Madras Government was Knighted. People wondered why. But there was no mystery really. The Government had rewarded him for signal services he had done them in the province of pure law. It is undeniable that the Indian Sale of Goods Act and the Indian Partnership Act bear the impress of Sir Alladi's intellect and vast legal experience. One could imagine the other members of the special committee, presided over by Sir Brojendra Mitter, looking askance at the unimpressive Madrased lawyer, and almost unconscious of him, arriving at conclusions with a curious inconsequence. Sir B. L. Mitter, courteous and genial, smiling, delightful, contagiously optimistic, but not so very profound, also very subtle in matters of law, Sir B. L. Mitter and his colleagues who have all but given the finishing touches to the draft, are a little taken aback to find that the Madrased lawyer wishes to say something. In fact, the Madras Advocate-General has a good deal to say. The draft is all wrong; it is a house of cards; it wouldn't stand the rough test of experience; it would break in actual life. There is no mistaking Alladi's meaning. They all think it over: why, it is all true, Mr. Krishnaswami Aiyar is free to propose his suggestions. They will be accepted, and so they are offered unassumingly nevertheless confidently, and they are accepted and incorporated as tangible provisions in the fabric of law. Some such thing may have happened (it is pure speculation) before the Simla Gods and their Southern Satellites decided to confer upon Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer a Knighthood. The South Indian has had to assert himself in the North to get a hearing, and has done so again and again and won his laurels. Sir Alladi's capacity for clear thinking gives him the assertive impulse; the commendable tact he has for judicious reiteration enables him to ever steer clear of the dreary precincts of boredom. If the lawyer's elemental passion for incessant intellectual exercises crystallises even ordinary addresses into models of logical reasoning and sparkling exposition, platitude is absent, verbiage has no place, everything is reduced to clause and subclause, theorems and corollaries. Humanity is comprehended in a formula, God snugly fits into a definition. You are not dazzled with the lightning flashes of a Motilal Nehru, you are not stirred to your depths by the assaults of emotion or the surges of national sentiment; but the distinct intimations of intellectual activity that impinge on your expectant consciousness make you realise the supremacy of mind over matter, of idea over mere object. Such an intellectual satisfaction convincing in its veracity, one always gets when listening to a speech by Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer.

What of the future, then? He may be roped into the Executive, as successor to Sir M. Krishnan Nair or Sir Brojendra Mitter, or perhaps he may be persuaded to exchange the wig for the gown. It is so difficult and so useless to prophesy. Madras Advocate-Generals have had curious after histories. Anything between Congress Presidentship to Leadership of the Assembly is possible, but it is safe to say that whatever path Sir Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer may ultimately decide to tread, he would distinguish himself there to a pre-eminent degree and evoke and deserve the applause and the gratitude of his countrymen.