

AN INDUSTRIAL
SCIENTIST

BY
N. PERUMAL

LIFE BOOK DEPOT
COIMBATORE

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This is the biography of an unusual Indian whose life is full of colour, drama, achievements, fights, thrills and service to the people around him. Mr. G. D. Naidu is "truly a man in a million perhaps this is an understatement", is what Sir C. V. Raman, India's Nobel-laureate in Physics has said of him. From poverty to power, Naidu rose in life and his success, he attributes entirely to hard work, directed on correct lines. Beginning his working-career as an auto-transport driver in Coimbatore in his twenties, he became a millionaire in ten years time; then, in another ten years, he had given away his millions to found institutions to foster technical education and for various other philanthropical causes. His life is not only an example, but an inspiration to the youth in India. Here is a lucidly-written story which gives out the essential features of his life.

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PREFACE

In Coimbatore, the third big town in this Province called by many the *Manchester of South India*, because of its numerous cotton mills with chimneys belching smoke, there is a well-known home. To a way-side rail porter or the driver of a bullock cart, you might mention it and he at once recognizes the place with a smile. *Gopal Bagh*, they call it. And no home in Coimbatore is visited by more people in a day than this. It is the home of no politician or publicist, statesman or senator. It is the home of a man of uncommon brains, with an amazing career. Like the hero of a story book, he has risen from poverty to power through hard work and ideas. His contribution to modern India is in the realm of her industries, inventions and transport organization, for, he is today the presiding genius of a huge transport combine in South India. As an inventor he has a good claim for wide recognition, but his inventions are better appreciated in Europe

and America than they are taken at their real worth here. This tragedy is peculiar to India, because of our industrial backwardness. All the same, people understand him, respect him and love him. The worth of his life and work is a matter for another generation to understand in its true perspective, I believe, perhaps after he is gone from our midst! It is so with every Indian of eminence. It may be so with even Gopal Naidu Doraisamy Naidu of Coimbatore, whom Sir Arthur Hope, the Governor of Madras in 1945 compared to Lord Nuffield, the British Industrialist who is respected for his varied philanthropies.

Gopal Bagh, the beautiful home of Doraisamy Naidu, has a garden in front, and it is a modern home. Here, furnishing had been done in good taste and it is a place of much activity during the day. For one thing, the number of visitors whom Naidu receives, is amazing. He meets everyone of them without reserve, attends to their needs, entertains them and talks to them, for, he believes in good fellowship. The man has a mountain of work each day to handle. Still,

for fear of being misunderstood as rude to visitors, he goes even to that extent of sacrificing his work to please them.

A thin man of medium height, big-head, clean-shaved face, G. D. Naidu always wears a smile on his lips. He dresses himself in a simple *dhoti*, shirt and upper-cloth, lives a life based on vegetarianism, eschewing alcohol and entertainments like the movies or the opera. He smokes a cigarette at intervals. He had no formal English education through any college, but he has a good working knowledge of that language, picked up by dint of his merit. Very humble and unassuming, he is a delightful conversationalist with a wealth of details on men and matters. To be closetted with him for a few hours hearing him talk, is a special education in itself. He has travelled far and wide and wherever he went, he came across a lot of eminent men whom he counts today as friends, with the result that each week his foreign mail comes to about five hundred personal letters, typed out by his secretaries.

It was a chance meeting that I had with him in the summer of 1941 at Coimbatore. A

kindly friend took me to meet him. The meeting was brief, but on parting, the impression he left in me was tremendous.

I was then bent upon making a study of him and the one reason that prompted me to do so was that a man of Naidu's type would delight the reader, as I myself felt the delight, once I knew him and his work. It has all the colour, thrill, glamour and adventure associated with the drama of a *full life*. Lives of men like Naidu ought to stimulate us to enter into useful fields of intense activity in life with the laudable purpose of serving humanity. If this book can make any contribution towards that ideal, I would feel that I have spent my time wisely in writing it.

When I once expressed to him my desire to know about his tour in the United States, a country where I myself spent a few pleasant years, Naidu obliged me by allowing all his papers connected with it to be gone through. The rest of the material has been collected with the help of mutual friends. I regret that I had no opportunity to verify the facts so collected

with Naidu, because he found no time or willingness for it. Thus, he has not seen a line of what is going into this book. However, mutual friends who have read through the script testify that the best possible accuracy has been obtained in this story. With that judgement, I venture to pass on the manuscript to the Publishers.

There is vast material in a life so rich as Naidu's to be dealt with. But here, I am presenting only the most significant facts about it, keeping in mind the modern trends in the art of biography, which come to concise narrative, different from elaborate writing, as in the *Victorian Era*.

Madras,

January, 17, 1944.

N. P.

THE SECOND EDITION

Four years have passed by, since the first edition of this book was published. Within three months of its issue in 1944, the Publishers felt that I should revise the book with more material about Naidu, since the

demand was as such! I myself was keen on satisfying the public in that, then itself, but I had to leave Madras soon after. Subsequently, my journalistic work was so very pressing that I found no time at all to respond to the call of the Publishers to issue a *reprint*. Today, I feel that the delay is somewhat justified. There have been more interesting developments in the career of Mr. Naidu which I record in this book with pleasure. The work covers the essential details of his life upto the closing months of the year 1946.

I must be failing in my duty if I do not adequately express my grateful thanks to hundreds of readers of the *first edition*, who approved of my humble effort in presenting the famous South Indian to them. I am no less grateful to the hundreds of newspapers in India, which gave very enthusiastic reviews of the book.

Calcutta,
May 1, 1948.

N. P.

THE THIRD EDITION

Ever since this book was first issued, continuous public appreciation and demand have made the appearance of yet another *edition* now inevitable. The story of Naidu has been here brought up to the month of January 1951 in this *re-print*. His is a story that is growing, full of fresh incidents added, and with him, it seems always the case of the future bringing forth more interesting material than the past! So, the enduring interest of the story is being maintained, as days pass on! To an author, sympathy and understanding of his work matters much more than anything else, and about this book, that has been the case with the two previous issues. I hope it will be the same, with the present one too.

Cape Comorin,
March, 1951.

N. P.

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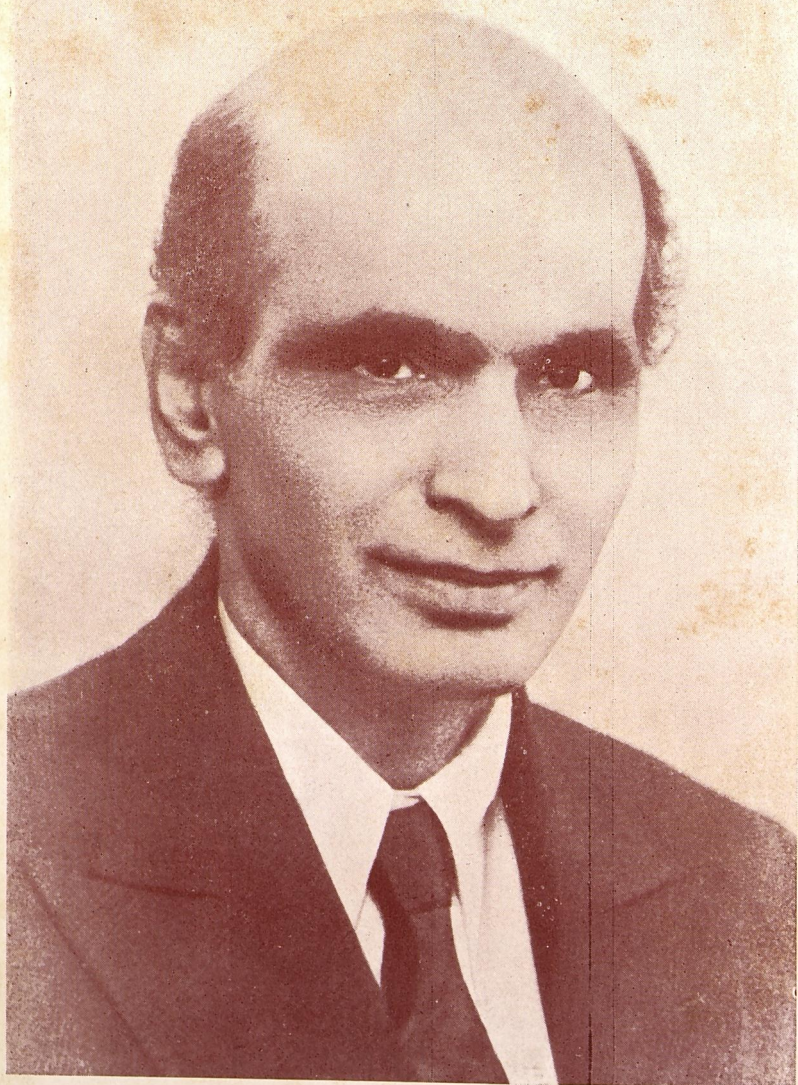
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G. D. NAIDU

AN INDUSTRIAL SCIENTIST

I

FORMATIVE YEARS

In the 1890s, village schools in the Coimbatore District had not taken to the use of slate-plates or paper. The schools themselves were then an *apologia* for what they are today! Usually, a learned Pandit of the village collected a few tender-aged boys, sat on a verandah and in loud rhythmic tones taught them the *three R's*. Writing was taught, the letters being written on sand! In the village of Lakshminaickenpalayam, just sixteen miles south-east of the town of Coimbatore, this was what one saw in those days. One of the pupils in the village attending a school of that sort was a raw-boned, militant, sparkling, small-eyed little boy aged five who answered to the name

of Doraisamy. The year was 1898. His mother died at Kalangal when he was one year old and he was taken later on by his father's maternal uncle who went by the name of Ramasamy Naidu. He sent Doraisamy to school. But the lad did not like to go there! Still, he was a lad and whether he liked it or not, he had to go! And he went for a time, almost for three years. He then learnt to read, write and recite in Tamil, though he felt all the time that his village school was a sort of prison from which he longed for freedom. The school then did not hold him for long. He prepared his own way for an exit. He made a short job of it. He threw sand in the eyes of the school master and there was much bleeding! His uncle was informed of it. He had the boy removed from the school, because Doraisamy had hit the eye of another school master too, on a previous occasion. Ramasamy Naidu would not give room for a third repetition of the act. He sent him forthwith to his father Gopal Naidu in his village Kalangal, where the boy was born. There, the elder Naidu had

Formative Years

been growing millet, tobacco and other crops. Doraisamy, aged eight was left here in charge of sturdy servants in the adjacent farm and on no account should he return to Kalangal, the village proper.

The boy liked the atmosphere out here, in the farm. Food was sent to him daily from Kalangal through servants. He was happy amidst trees, corn fields and singing birds. The solitary country life immensely pleased him. He wandered about leisurely. He read Tamil books every day and acquired knowledge all by himself. In other words, Doraisamy was not prepared to learn anything that was forced on him. He should take what he wanted and that was the sort of education he sought in life.

One year had gone by. Then one day Gopal Naidu sent word to get Doraisamy to Kalangal because the festival of *Deeparali* had to be celebrated and the father was anxious to have the son with him. The journey was done by foot in the company of servants. But

on the road, Doraisamy's twinkling mischievous eyes caught sight of a passing hay-cart. He was attracted by it. In another moment, a lighted match stick in his hand had done the harm to the innocent cartman. The haystack caught fire and there was a terrific blaze! In this, there is a little touch of Sir Malcolm Campbell, the British auto-speed king, who set a forest ablaze in his youth, for the mere fun of it!

When Doraisamy was brought back to Kalangal, the accompanying servants also brought information to Gopal Naidu as to how the boy had set the hay-cart burning on the road! The troubled cotton merchant heard it and turned silent in a minute. He could not understand the mind of his little son. Words failed him now. The only thing he did then was to order the servants to take back the boy at once to the farm and keep him there until a fresh order was sent. For the next nine years Doraisamy was in the farm itself, but he often visited the village, his father not knowing it!

Formative Years

Finally, he abandoned the farm and came to the village itself. When he was roaming about, he saw an empty bottle of *pain-killer*, a patent medicine made by Park Davis Co. of U. S. A. and knowing the meaning of this word from a Revenue Inspector and with his help, imported the medicine from America. Everyone in the village suffered from headache and to relieve pain, why not get this wonder-medicine and sell? That was his idea. Soon he obtained supplies from U. S. A. and began thriving in business. Watches, harmoniums and a few other novelties were also included in his line of business. He was satisfied, now that his small beginnings in business were proving good.

Doraisamy was a handsome youngman those days. Tall, thin and of good facial features, he was attractive-looking. Village damsels admired him. Many went to him to ask for a rub with the *pain-killer* on their forehead and he did a little rubbing alright! But his moral code and ethics were above reproach. He enjoyed the fun, but made no emotional

overtures to the damsels who made him a *pain-reliever*! He found now and then, a few of his fair admirers going to him for fun and when he came across such cases, he promptly reported to their relatives that they had no actual headache!

This youth of enterprise had by this time formed a little gang around him in the village. He was their leader and was faithfully followed. They once decided to take a census of the widows in the village and they did! They became censors of public morals too! Illicit love affairs were promptly watched and the relatives of the erring damsels were told about it. In serious cases, such damsels themselves were told to their face that they had better mend their ways. Such were the strange pastimes of Doraisamy in Kalangal in the days of his youth! He was, in brief, the *play-boy* of his village.

A villager grew pomegranate plants and they yielded good fruits. A fruit a day was supplied to Gopal Naidu, and son Doraisamy

Formative Years

took delivery of it. One day, the son for himself, made a demand which was refused. The next day, all the pomegranates had vanished from the garden!

We know the story of Shelly at the Riveira and his enthusiasm to make toy paper boats and see them run along the waters. When he asked his wife whether she had a piece of paper to make a boat, she said that she had not any. Whereupon, Shelly seized a hundred pounds note from her hand bag, made a tiny boat of it and let it go, watching the fun as the little thing glided along the waters! Similarly, Doraisamy once saw some youngmen flying kites and he wanted to do it himself. He found a spare kite in the hands of one of the enthusiasts, but there was no rope. Nearby, a goldsmith was making a long gold string to complete an ornament. He seized the string from him and tied the kite to it! There was then great fun for him!

Doraisamy had no respect for the elders of the village and these elders feared this pale, thin youth, whose mischievous deeds were assuming

legendary importance. One day, he called a villager by a nickname. "You are *Gandharvan*", he dubbed him! The man got wild and beat Doraisamy. That night, *Gandharvan* went to sleep in his hut as usual, but at midnight he found it ablaze! Doraisamy and his gang enthusiastically watched the hut burning, like a Nero fiddling at Rome's burning! Another villager appeared on the scene and inquired about the fire and was about to open the door which was locked from outside. Meanwhile, many villagers turned up and asked Doraisamy and his gang, "who set up the fire?" They calmly pointed out to *Gandharvan's* neighbour, who wanted to unlock the door!

In Kalangal, the villagers had decided that poor workmen, who laboured in the corn fields should be paid a daily wage of three annas and their women folk, two annas. Doraisamy's heart went for the poor toilers. He felt that they should be paid more. The villagers would not agree. They said that if any single individual broke this wage-rate system, they had to pay to

Formative Years

the community funds a fine of five rupees. Doraisamy and his gang decided to break it. They told the labourers to go on a strike and they did. The workers feared that they would have to starve, but Doraisamy said that he had about eight hundred rupees, which he made from his *pain-killer* business and that every pie of it would be given to support them till the wages were increased! The village chieftain sent word for workers from the neighbouring villages, but Doraisamy threatened that black-legging would not be tolerated, and it would be punished by murder. Eventually, the village chieftain was forced to pay the higher wages stipulated by Doraisamy.

Similarly, the village *barber* of Kalangal was once slipped by him. He was paid by each villager about ten rupees worth of corn in a year for barbering, massaging each villager at oil baths, and for attending funerals where he had specific duties to perform. Doraisamy felt that the wages paid to him were low. Personally, he wanted the barber

only for shaving the face and cropping the head. He never took oil baths and he has never taken one all his life. He told the barber that he would be paid monthly five rupees for his services. But then the barber defaulted to serve him regularly and promptly, whereupon Doraisamy one day publicly beat him with a sandal! A complaint was made to the village leaders but they winced! "Doraisamy?" they gasped for breath, "Well, we shall not take any notice of what he does!" In all these, here was the touch of a Clive in the making, a mischievous lad destined to do great things in manhood!

During this period, he had become a bit self-educated in Tamil. From the farm-yard itself, he was reading Tamil literature which suited his taste and interests. He learnt the *Ramayana* and the *Maha Bharata* and the *Sangam* literature in Tamil, such as *Tholkappium*, *Silappathikaram* and *Paththupattu*, *Thiruppugazh* songs and the literature on philosophy, astrology, and medicine and the like. Fiction, he hated from the very bottom

Formative Years

of his heart. He had no use for novels of a kind then beginning to come out now and then, in Tamil. But then we know that all practical men of great deeds in life had never been favourites with books of fiction. Lord Northcliffe hated such literature and declared that he had no use for it. So also, Ford and Edison scorned at it! No wonder, Doraisamy disliked it too!

Then, he was married, married to a village maiden Chellammal by name. At the wedding, the bridegroom was missing! At the appointed auspicious hour for the tying of the sacred jewel on the bride, the youngman was not there! A search was begun and finally, he was spotted out in the farm-yard but quietly resting in a contemplative mood. He stated that he hated a priest conducting a ceremony of whose actual purpose and meaning, he knew not. The priest was there, but no ceremonies were conducted and Doraisamy finally agreed to tie the jewel around his bride's neck. Thus, he and Chellamal became man and wife. He was twenty, just then.

II

BEGINNINGS IN BUSINESS

When he was staying in the farm-yard at Kalangal, a tall middle-aged European had gone there one day in a strange looking vehicle, which attracted Doraisamy. The man was Mr. Lancashire attending to the Government survey and settlement work in the Coimbatore District. He went about the place in his auto-cycle and when he went to Kalangal, there was engine trouble. Meeting Doraisamy, he asked for a little rag-cloth and kerosene and they were supplied. Doraisamy looked at the foreigner with curiosity and he thought that here was a specimen suffering from white-leprosy! The brazen white complexion of Mr. Lancashire was such a wonder in the eyes of this farm-lad, then! Apart from that, the young man keenly observed Lancashire setting the engine of his cycle in order. The process much interested him. A desire to possess the vehicle seized Doraisamy now, but the European and his vehicle vanished pretty soon from the

Beginnings in Business

farm. He never forgot that strange vehicle and he was bent upon getting it some time, sooner or later!

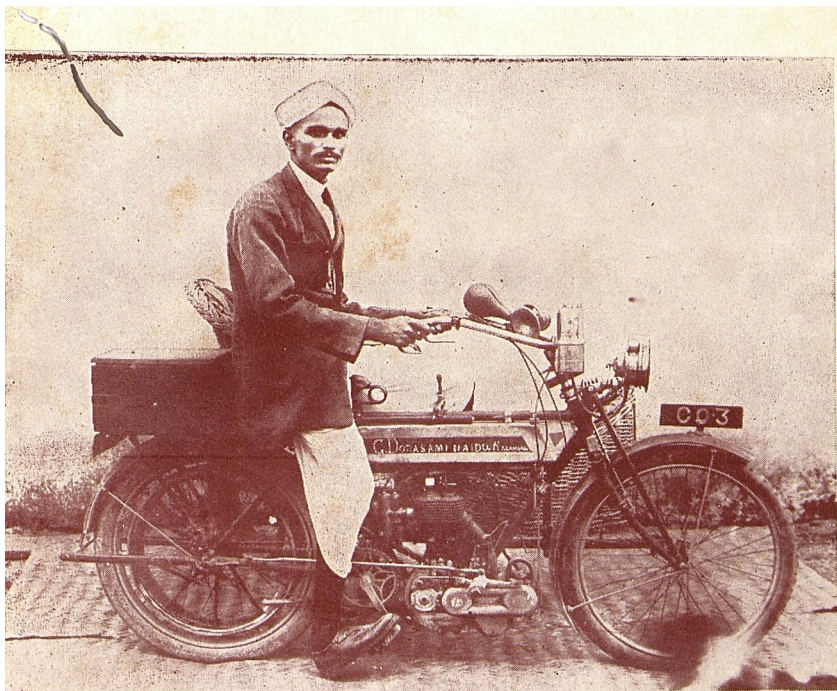
Doraisamy was twenty when he actually left his village and came to Coimbatore. When he saw a railway train, he was thrilled. On its sight, he was stilled. He stood for a few minutes wondering at the vehicle, which moved speedily with the aid of steam, making strange noises. Objects of this kind interested this shrewd village lad and he was now going to town to see more of them! He arrived! Having no money in hand and having the problem of appeasing hunger before him, he at once joined a hotelman to serve. Doraisamy was to get three rupees a month and free food now as a hotel assistant and he accepted this situation calmly, though he was aiming at greater things in life. Three brief years were spent as such and he found that he had four hundred rupees to his credit as savings. At once he went up to Lancashire, the Settlement Officer, who was happily still in Coimbatore,

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and offered to buy his motor cycle. It was got. Doraisamy tampered with it, removed the parts one by one, re-fitted them again and used it. He went on toying with this machine and learnt all about its structure and mechanism by sheer self-experiment.

The drudgery of being a mere mechanic did not fully interest the ambitious Doraisamy. He soon managed to borrow a few hundreds of rupees and went into the cotton market to do business. Being a speculative affair, he profitted and lost money side by side. After a few months he found himself completely wrecked in this venture and all the capital of his had gone to the winds! But he was not the man to give up a fight. He would steadily pursue 'dame luck' whether she came to him or not. He had also the courage to outface misfortunes. Nothing was too small or too big a job for this enterprising youth.

He soon decided to take up service in a ginning factory at Singanailur. He received



NAIDU & HIS AUTO - CYCLE
His earliest interest

Beginnings in Business

here free food and twelve rupees every month, but he was not in service for long. The independent spirit in him was too much to tolerate servility under anyone. His brain revolted and he wanted to start his own business. Pretty soon, he had obtained enough capital to start a cotton ginning factory of his own at Tiruppur. He put in seventeen thousands into this venture. When World War I broke out, Doraisamy's business thrived. Soon after the war, he found himself having a hundred and fifty thousand rupees to himself. By this time, he had become somewhat *important* in the small town of Coimbatore. He took an interest in public matters too and journeyed to attend the sessions of the Indian National Congress in various centres of the country from year to year.

Perhaps he found Coimbatore a small place now! His imagination rioted. He dreamt of the possibilities of one making fortunes in the cotton business in Bombay. He found cotton brokers from the North coming to Coimbatore and prospering. He now decided that he would go up to Bombay. He did.

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He stayed there for one and a half years in business and lost the one and a half lakhs of rupees, he had earned from the ginning factory at Tiruppur. Penniless, he came back to Coimbatore. Once again, he was ready to go into service, since he found not even a dog's chance to obtain a decent capital to do any further business. But Doraisamy was considered *honourable* in the business circles and this credit he was to maintain at all costs! He would not even go to his father at Kalangal though the aged Gopal Naidu, was ever ready to welcome him back home.

At this time there lived in Coimbatore a remarkable foreign business man who went by the name of Sir Robert Stanes. He owned a mill, had rubber, tea and coffee plantations and at the close of the last world war, had gone into the automobile business too. To him Doraisamy went offering his services as a mechanic. But the large-hearted Stanes, who had already known a little about Doraisamy's personal abilities declined to accept him for service. Instead, he counselled that the young man

Beginnings in Business

should continue to do business, a different kind of business from cotton, this time. Doraisamy was to purchase an automobile and run it for hire and for this Sir Robert advanced a loan of four thousand rupees. Another four thousand was to be raised by Doraisamy himself and he did raise it. At this time he also saw the late Dewan Bahadur Somasundaram Chettiar, who tendered him advice, to invest only half the available capital in business and keep the other half as reserve for any emergency. This way, Doraisamy went into the automobile business for the first time and the year was 1920.

The first passenger auto-coach which Doraisamy purchased was let on service between Pollachi and Palani, a distance of about forty miles, himself driving it. Such was the beginning but in the third and fourth decade of the current century, in all India, he was the one man, who had the largest efficient fleet of public transport auto-vehicles in command. He is even today the best known automobile-man from this country to foreigners.

III

AUTO-TRANSPORT MAN

G. D. Naidu, the most widely known automobile transport man in India knows the problem of road transport in all its manifold phases. His transport vehicles ran on all the roads in his own district Coimbatore and his buses served other districts too, such as the Nilgiris, Madura and Malabar, also the Cochin State. The *Combine* known as the *United Motor Service* which Naidu governed had a fleet of more than two hundred buses covering a distance of fifteen hundred miles. At an average, they took at least ten thousand travellers in a day. The *Combine* maintained a staff of more than one thousand and ran an establishment bill of over seventeen thousand rupees each month. The whole organization of this business was up to date and *American*, showing clearly efficiency as its hall-mark. The entire business was divided into various departments, having a *chief* for each. There

Auto-transport Man

was a General Manager who looked into the business as a whole and above all, the whole governing policy was in the hands of Naidu himself.

Though he became a successful automobile transport business man in the third decade of the present century, in Coimbatore, it did not give him any monopoly such as he had in the next decade. In 1933, he brought around several bus owners together and formed a *Combine* which was well known as *United Motors*. Competition in the trade was thus eliminated and many a bus owner who lost in the *pre-combine* days smilingly took his cheque monthly without any worry. Naidu is a strong believer in co-operative action and this, his first achievement in the organization of a huge transport *combine* was a remarkable land-mark in life.

The services of this transport-combine to the public could be chronicled into many large volumes. The seating accommodation in the buses, the courteous service rendered by the

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employees, the conveniences provided at the terminals, all are praiseworthy of an enterprise run by a genius of the type of Naidu. "The U. M. S. has as its Managing Agent a man of considerable initiative", remarks Mr. S. R. N. Badri Rao, in his book *Road Rail Transport* published a decade ago, and edited by Dr. B. V. Narayanaswamy Naidu, well known Economist. He added that by providing healthy and adequate means of transport resulting in social and economic good, the United Motors deserved congratulations. And it was the ambition of Naidu to introduce such types of auto-vehicles for public transport as those in England and the United States to ensure greater convenience to the travelling public. But this modest ambition of his could not be realized owing to the refusal of the District Board to permit him to do it! One could hardly understand the attitude of this local administration in our country.

The personal interest Naidu evinced in his business is commendable. He had a

Auto-transport Man

code of conduct for his workers. Honesty and politeness, devotion to duty, all were emphasized in that code. Often he, like Caliph Harun-al Rashid travelled *incognito* in his buses to observe how well the staff behaved towards the public. Once he observed that his shed-watchman at Dindigul neglected his duty, and left the premises unattended for the whole night. On another occasion he noticed rash-driving. Once he sent a man to give a slap to one of his bus conductors, just to see whether there was any retaliation. The workers were asked not to retaliate, according to the rules governing their employment. He found no retaliation and the good tempered worker got a decent promotion!

By these methods the United motors maintained a staff of men who were exemplary in their behaviour towards the public and it may be surmised that these automobile crew formed the finest model in the business in this country. No small credit for the Governor of the whole show!

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Walk into the offices of the United Motors and you will be amazed to see the Americanization of the entire establishment by which I mean the efficiency of the working system. In fact, there is no bus-transport yard in the whole of India, so scrupulously kept clean. As you enter the office building, a woman clerk at the inquiry-counter politely asks you your precise business, there. If you want to see the *Boss*, she informs him the name and the nature of the business through the *amplycall* and his answer is communicated to you. You go up a flight of steps. A door gently opens for you and you are now face to face with the most amazing businessman of South India. Politeness having taken abode in him, his welcome encourages you at once. With a smile he rises up to receive you — Prince or plebian, converses with you without reserves and in this, he has a graduated treatment of visitors. As he talks on to you the telephone bell rings and he answers, an able woman-secretary walks up to his table and places a number of papers for signature, the *amplycall* on the table blares out

Auto-transport Man

a message for him from his engineer in the workshop of his Electrical company in Peelamedu, over a distance of four miles! The man sits up unperturbed, attending to you and all that, his capacity for multifarious work, so evident!

These days, he attends to his work daily after lunch. But his office working hours in the United Motors offices used to be between the hours of nine and one in the night! Similarly, when he found that he had too many visitors who stood in his way of regular working, he said that he could meet them only during the hours of one in the night and six in the morning!

He took the keenest interest in his business. Naidu, like Ford, clearly knew the names of each and every workman of his in his establishment, their ways, tastes, difficulties, temperaments. One day he was amazed to find in his office that 64 men were on leave, 43 absent, 223 coming late! He could not

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tolerate such irregularities and immediately set up to work to remedy them. Each day, he sat taking statistics. Six months later, he found one day that the order was, 12 went on leave, 6 became absent, and only two were late-comers! A year later one day, he found that two were on leave, one absent, and none came late! He once issued a *memo* stating that if anyone worked when he was sick, he would be levied a fine of ten rupees!

He used to chide his secretaries for keeping their desks unclean, laughed at their silly mistakes, cautioned them to improve their work and ruthlessly dismissed them when they proved terribly intolerable. Once he wanted to send a letter to a friend in Gulberga, but his *steno* typed the letter addressed to one "Dear Mr. Gulberga"! He had the laugh and frankly showed his friends that letter and chuckled how capable were his secretaries! Indeed, a man of such brutal frankness and open ways of living, Naidu could have occasionally a laugh against himself too, in fine sportsmanly manner,

Auto-transport Man

and he keeps a personal file marked "My own Blunders"!

Naidu employed amongst his staff, women as secretaries and telephone girls as they have it in Europe and America, as also in many British business firms in this country. In his Radio Factory, he employed a woman engineer, something unusual in South India even in this year of grace 1951!

He kept his finger on every button in his business. He had kept up *amplycall* connections to his house, his workshop, his Electrical Company, his staff room and in fact everywhere! At times, he switched on to the passengers' waiting-shed and listened to the conversations of the travelling public in his transports. He did so merely with a view to understand and ascertain their views on his transport system and their complaints, if any. Often he got precious information that way, which led to many improvements in his business.

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In the United Motors Office, one saw a good range of files devoted to varied topics. Perhaps he has the best filing system of any Indian business in South India. Some of them are very amusing. For instance, I came across a file entitled "Friendship." In it, he has the letters of many folk who were once friends and who later fell out, then reunited! All have written their views in letters to Naidu and he used to study them and think over as to how friendships are formed and broken! I saw another file on the 'Police.' Here he has jotted down his many thoughts on the *law-guardians*. In one paper he had written that with a little bribe, one got things done by the Police quickly. If it was not given, things were delayed! Naidu could not understand why there should be a rule that bribing was bad, then! The interesting names of other files are A C F R. (Appreciation, Courtesy, Flattery and Reality, wherein letters from friends and others are collected.) *How to set the buffaloes in line, How to extract work, My blunders, My Muhammed Bin Tughlak, How to oppose Music, Astrology, God etc!*

Auto-transport Man

In 1929, he tried a novel scheme. Accordingly he decided to give a bus to each one of his drivers. He experimented this scheme by allotting one bus for a particular driver. Soon, jealousy cropped up amongst them and there was endless trouble. The scheme, therefore, failed and he found workers not fit to receive the benefit of this novel scheme.

In 1931, the economic blizzard, which swept over the whole world, had its pin-pricks felt even in Naidu's transport enterprise. There were losses in the working of this business and he was almost willing to wind up everything "not willing to undertake unprofitable risk and hardship." But it was alright with him, the man who had a fortune behind him for himself. But the, what of his fleet of workers, who entirely depended upon him for a living? Taking stock of this situation, he said:

"My personal wants could be satisfied within eight annas to a rupee a day; that was my motive, but I had to think of the five hundred and more of the families depending upon me for their maintenance."

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This consideration weighed before his eyes more than anything else. He kept on the business and incurred a loss to the tune of a couple of hundred thousand rupees. A liberal hearted employer, he at no time neglected the interests of his employees.

As a believer in co-operative action, Naidu wanted to organize a union of all those, who were responsible to run the automobile business in South India. It was with that ideal had he to convene a conference of bus owners in this Province shortly after his second visit to Europe. And a conference did assemble in Coimbatore. It was presided by Mr. F. J. Stanes, Managing Director of the Stanes Motors Ltd.

On this unique occasion, Naidu, as Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Conference made a brilliant speech touching all aspects of the automobile transport business in South India. He said that India was still to make its progress in the matter of transport, but she was not behind such countries as China

Auto-transport man

or Russia. The biggest obstacle to the progress of this transport business was high taxation, he said.

The conference loudly voiced the grievances of the bus owners in the Province and passed several resolutions to be sent to the Government. Every one present spoke highly of the services of Naidu in the best interests of the auto-transport business.

There was loud talk in many quarters in India in pre-war times that the transports should be run by the state. *Socialization of transports* was a political slogan, but Naidu, a Capitalist, was the first to move in the matter. He was, of course, reaping good gains in his business, but then, in the larger interests of the people, he felt that it would be better if the State were to run the transports in this country. Having such a view, he, in 1938, suggested to the Coimbatore District Board to run the automobile transport lines in the district. He offered his whole automobile business valued at the time about 18 lakhs to the Coimbatore

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District Board to be run by them on one condition that the profits should be utilized for industrial education. The District Board did not care even to reply his offer. In the same way he offered his whole valuable library to the Coimbatore Municipality, also Rs. 10,000/- for a swimming pool for which also no acceptance was received from the Municipality. After giving these offers the District Board tried to take over the bus service one by one to run and started the bus service in one line in which they failed. The reason for all these was the Congress Government then in power and the Local Boards and Municipalities administered by Congressmen.

In the same year, he created an Educational Trust after his name with a view to impart industrial education to young men in his own district as well as the neighbouring ones. While creating this Trust, he devised a plan by which the money could be found for such a philanthropic enterprise. He suggested to the various Municipalities in and around

Auto-transport Man

Coimbatore to take shares free of cost in his automobile combine and run it. The profits they got, he insisted, should be devoted to industrial education in each centre. The Municipalities by themselves had no initiative for such enterprises as opening industrial schools and when this philanthropist proposed a scheme for it, even then they did not have the eye to appreciate it! Except one Municipal Council, all the rest turned down the scheme as unacceptable! Even that single Municipality insisted on the sanction of the Government before placing its acceptance with the Trustees of the Naidu Industrial Education Trust. When he looked into these events, he being a man of precise mind, came to only one conclusion. The temper of time was against him, he felt.

In his business, Naidu had no soft-sailing althrough. He often encountered difficulties all round. The officialdom tried to bring him under control, but Naidu the born-rebel would not submit himself. At Palladam, an important

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road-transport junction, he had built a magnificent and perhaps the biggest Bus station in India. Here, people found all conveniences while travelling. More than a lakh of rupees had been spent to construct and convenience this depot, so that travellers might be benefitted.

When Naidu wanted to have a similar depot for himself on a decent scale at Palghat, the Municipality would not allow him to do it. They insisted that his *autos* should also be placed in the common Municipal Depot, though it did not provide any convenience to travellers as the one at Palladam, which the United Motors proposed building at Palghat. It was a first rate controversial matter between the United Motors Combine and the Palghat Municipal council for long. Finally, officialdom had its way, though cine films were taken to court and screened to show the actual position to establish evidence on Naidu's side.

In 1938, when Pt. Jawaharlal took the initiative to form the National Planning Committee, Naidu was thought of for membership.

Auto-transport Man

Accordingly Mr. Giri, who was Minister for Labour in the first Congress Ministry in Madras, was seen writing to Naidu saying that Sir M. Visweswarayya, India's great engineer, had been speaking on high terms about his knowledge of the automobile industry. Mr. Giri invited him to sit on the Committee in his capacity as a specialist on transport matters. To this request Naidu turned a deaf ear and wrote that, "though I am looking after my business in a straightforward way, I am put to lot of troubles and inconveniences by the Government, especially the Congress Government in Madras!" Then Mr. Giri himself went over to Coimbatore, personally met Naidu and urged him to accept the membership. However, he never sat on the Committee, because he left for Europe within the next few days.

To establish an automobile factory in Coimbatore appeared a great ambition in him. He stated that three Indian States had offered to co-operate with him in this matter, but they did not agree to the factory being located in Coimbatore. He felt that if such a factory were

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to be started, it could turn out at least a thousand automobiles every month. Experiments to manufacture Diesel and Gas engines could also be carried on in the same factory. American help would be necessary for any such venture. But it is doubtful whether a vision of this kind Naidu is dreaming of, would ever see fruition now or in the near future, the international situation remaining so disturbed as it is. It might be that in a venture of the kind, there would result in losses for the first five or six years, but then they had to be met. In other words, he called upon our industrial magnates to boldly venture into the project, if they had the vision and the strength, something which he himself had, to commence that enterprise. At first an electric motor manufacturing factory was opened in 1939 by Sir George Boag, then Chief Secretary to Government and the first Radio Factory was opened by Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chetti in 1941, almost all parts having been made in the factory.

IV

INVENTOR

It is a phenomenon of our times that some of the foremost inventors of this century have sprung up from that class of men, who had no formal education in any University. Edison and Ford are good examples of this type of men. When Edison died he did not leave a penny for any University in the United States, though he had endowed part of his fortune for many other public purposes. Then the talk was that the famous inventor never believed in academic training very much! Here in Coimbatore, G. D. Naidu, who is no schooled intellect, is not only a front-ranker automobile transport businessman, but a genius who has an inventor's talents. From the day he saw the strange-looking auto-cycle of Lancashire, Naidu's brain was after technical matters. Even in his early teens he wanted to know the mechanism of the motor-car, the oil-engines, so on and so forth. He solved every problem in this particular

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branch of science himself, working for hours together at each one of them. He devised an electric safety razor ten years ago and it has been in the market in other countries except in India! The precise story of this invention is quite interesting.

When he went to England in 1932, he sought after London barbers for a shave. Here, in Coimbatore, twice or thrice a week a barber of the tonsorial rank shaved him and with that, he was content. Now, when English barbers began shaving him, they demanded anything from a shilling to two. A believer in the 'waste not, want not' maxim, he was unwilling to pay a shilling for a shave. So, he sought out the alternative and that was, to learn for himself, for the first time, the art of self-shaving. He invested a few shillings then in the purchase of a hollow ground razor made of the best Sheffield steel and experimented with it. Once he cut the chin; another time he shaved away one side of the moustache rather unevenly from the other. The mirror created a horror

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in him when he saw how he was faring with his shaving lessons! He tried the *safety razor* too and even with this, he fared no better! Then only, he resolved that he would either invent a razor to give him a smooth shave, or in the alternative allow the growth of a great beard like the Salvation Army-founder Bramwell Booth!

The several razors and razor blades he tried in England proved unsatisfactory to him, since they were not giving him the smooth shaves he expected. When he came to Germany and frequented the Barber shops here too, he had to pay *one mark* for a shave! Even then, if he wanted to express ideas to the barber on what kind of shave he actually needed, he he could not speak fluent *German*, as much as he, in those days, could not speak even fluent *English*! Tormented with these thoughts, he went over to a small German town called Heilbronn, famous as a manufacturing centre for silver-ware, beet-sugar, paper and chemicals. Here, Naidu located a factory called Koffer-

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Asbestos and asked the proprietors to allot him a small room temporarily to carry on some experiments he liked. The factory folk were obliging. And here only, the great South Indian set about with the first experiment in the manufacture of his famous electric razor *Rasant*, with which he created a big sensation in the British razor-trade. The razor is worked by dry-cells placed inside it and a shave is free from skin scratches and patches.

Naidu manufactured at first a small electric motor in that factory to fit in the razor he had planned. He made that motor smaller and smaller, until it became such a tiny thing. What he did, he showed his German friends, who became very enthusiastic about it. They praised it and tipped him to have it patented in Germany at once. He did it, paying six hundred *marks* for it. He was also asked to advertise it but he hesitated. Having manufactured the motor in Germany for his razor, he went over to Switzerland to manufacture a suitable handle for it. There

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he worked on in one factory. Alike, he made the *grip-portion* of the razor in Belgium and had the card-board boxes for packing in India itself. He manufactured about ten thousand of these *Rasant* electric razors and took them to England when he went to Europe a second time in 1935. He wanted to invade the markets in London with his new invention, for which he had fashioned out a first-class *blade* which also went by the name *Rasant*. This blade is the *thinnest* anyone has so far manufactured in the world, it being about $1/200$ th of an inch. To push the sales of this razor and blade, he thought he had better advertise in the papers and so, went to the office of the *Times*. There, he was told, for a small insertion to run for thirty days, they would charge him as much as one thousand pounds! The amount was so huge that he refrained from advertising. Nevertheless, he saw London dealers with a view to put his invention in the market. Though they were interested, they were not at all too enthusiastic, for obvious reasons. He offered the dealers fifteen shillings apiece but

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even this low price, did not attract them! However, Naidu did manage to find a few fair-minded dealers who agreed to take his razors to place them in the show window. Soon, the thing caught on with the public. The demand for them increased. Naidu then increased the price to twentyfive shillings. In India itself, he distributed a thousand pieces, selling at nine rupees each!

Envyng the success of this son of India who produced an admirable electric razor which soon became the talk of all London, an English company was forthwith floated to produce a competitor in the market. It was known as the "Tele-Razor" and was widely advertised. The venture gradually misfired, inspite of those razors being sold at reduced prices—from 25 to 15 shillings! Even then, none patronised it. Eventually, the English concern had to be wound up! Naidu, that way, sold in two months 7,500 razors in London alone!

Many years later, when Naidu went to New York, a few of his American friends were

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amazed to see his *Rasant* razor and blades. Victor, an industrialist then offered him a monthly salary of three thousand dollars to manufacture these electric razors. Yet a second American offered him three lakhs of dollars for the entire patent right for the razor and the blade. Still, a third American business-magnate in Chicago suggested to Naidu the erection of a factory in that city to manufacture them on the basis of fifty-fifty profit-sharing. None of these suggestions were taken seriously by Naidu, all because *he wanted to manufacture them in India itself* with the loftiest of motives in him.

In Madras itself, the *Rasant* electric razor and the blades were very popular in known circles. The city's Europeans were the most enthusiastic lot. Nugent Grant, a well-known lawyer, insisted on using this razor and blade alone all through from the day he first came to know them. An official of the General Motors, Bombay, wrote so very praisingly about them. The *Rasant* blade in particular, was giving one

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as many as *two hundred shaves* so very easily and one user, indeed testified that he used it even for two years!

During the war, Mr. M. A. Srinivasan of the Government Supply Department, Madras, on coming to know of the efficiency of this product from his own experience as a patronizer, evinced some interest in their local manufacture. He wanted Naidu to manufacture the blades for the use of the soldiers and the inventor agreed. Srinivasan wanted production in three months and Naidu nodded his head in assent, provided the factory were to be situated in South India itself, to facilitate his personal supervision. A leading Indian steel producing company was asked to supply the necessary steel and some samples were submitted, though none of them came up to the specification of the Norwegian steel, with which Naidu originally manufactured these blades. Then, the steel producer asked for the actual manner of toning the steel he exactly needed and, this of course, Naidu refused to divulge,

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being a strict trade secret. The matter was then fully dropped like a cold bun!

Still later, when the Madras Government started their post-war plans, S. V. Ramamurthy, Chief Secretary, was very enthusiastic in including a plan for asking Naidu to manufacture *Rasant* blades. Along with the scheme for manufacturing machine tools in the province, the necessary machinery needed for manufacturing the blades was included in the list drawn up. Proposals for issuing Capital for the purpose was recommended upon by Government and sent to New Delhi but the Government of India did not see the propriety of manufacturing razor blades as anything urgent for us and for that reason, these proposals of the Madras Government were quickly consigned to their all consuming waste-paper basket. Naidu too, had now lived up to learn lessons in all these.

In the beginning of his career in the automobile line, he has made a special contrivance,

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which if applied to the auto-radiator, permits constant running of the vehicle for hundreds of miles without any need for fresh water to be poured in. Later, in 1936 he designed a vibrator-testing machine and another, to manufacture safety - razor blades. For the film cameras, he invented a distance adjuster. Now it works this way. If the object focussed is at a distance, then the film gets it in a smaller dimension, but if held close to the lens, the object appears big in the screen. But by using Naidu's adjuster, this difference could be done away with. A specially modelled fruit-juice extractor and a host of minor articles made of original designs have been worked up by Naidu. One of the finest of his inventions is the vote-recording machine. If used, it prevents tampering by dishonest people in the elections. Edison himself attempted to do it in his early career but some Senators in the 'States' scoffed at the idea and he dropped it. Naidu had done it in his own way and the machine was once exhibited at a *Park Fair* show in Madras. When questioned whether he

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was aware that Edison also once attempted on a machine of that sort, he declined all knowledge about it. He has originally designed what his mind conceived. There ended the matter.

Several other inventions or improvements were carried out amidst stress and strenuous hours. Everyday, he used to spend three or four hours experimenting with each object he invented and none of them took him more than a few weeks. Given the time, kept free from other business and public engagements, Naidu would have solely devoted his time for further inventions, which might be all to the benefit of India. True, the watchman at the gate has orders to restrict friends, and friends came to him in large numbers to seek his guidance on this and that. He was working to perfect a radio set and now he has made the beginning for a factory to turn out cheap and at the same time efficient sets, but he could not devote all his time for this work as his efforts to get some essential materials from foreign countries utterly failed. Every day he tells friends that

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he would be soon "out of the rut", but he had not been able to do so as yet!

None of his inventions are patented in India, he says. In 1940 in a letter from U. S. A. to a friend in India, a leading American businessman observed:

"So many of us here appreciate Mr. Naidu's inventions but he does not sell them. This is the place to sell them and we Americans want them!"

Still an extract from another letter of an American is as follows:

"A friend spoke very highly of Mr. Naidu mentioning how grateful he was for some of the valuable information given him - which saved 2000 dollars. In a few words he gave them an idea as to how to correct the imperfection of a machine"

An American factory once offered him a salary of \$ 3,000/- a month to commence manufacturing his razor and shaving blades. But he declined to accept the job, saying that he was not after any earning project

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in America, where he merely wished to learn what all he could. Such is the ability of the South Indian inventor, who could put aright the defects of a foreign manufactured machine for the mere interest he had in mechanical science!

A man of Naidu's inventive brains would have won greater recognition if he were born in any other country growing prosperous through industrialization, but in India, recognition had not come to him sufficiently enough. The man has not been understood properly. Our industrialists have not gone to him with a view to make use of his brains for the better development of industrial schemes in this country. He is ever there ready to do what he could. The Press has not noticed his activities sufficiently so far. Stories of his inventions have not been given adequate publicity even in scientific journals published in this country! He has no time to cultivate friendship with Pressmen or devote his days in publicity schemes. He goes on working in his own quiet

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manner and during his life time if people do not take advantage of the man's abilities, it is the people who stand to lose, not he! "All my inventions remain unpatented in this country", he once said. "Any Indian can take advantage of this open offer. Let him work on them, manufacture what he likes and benefit the nation"!

As an inventor, he had not the advantage of consulting many scientific books or records. Through hit and miss methods, he has perfected a manner of working all to himself but the soil of his mind is astonishingly fertile. Perhaps this process must have entitled more of his time but then, he is satisfied that his approach to each problem he solved, had been original and entirely his. His place in the ranks of modern men of science in India is assured.

V

WESTWARD HO!

In 1929 a German trader Mr. Kuhns and his wife arrived in Coimbatore. He was a dealer in rubber goods, hailing from Hanover. They were on a tour of India and when they reached Coimbatore Mrs. Kuhns was attacked by fever. Having found no accommodation in the Travellers' Bungalow, they had to stay in the *waiting room* provided by the United Motors for passengers. Naidu on coming to know that they were there, rendered all aid. The couple called on him before they left. They requested him to visit Germany. Every year, they sent him Christmas greetings and persistently wrote that Naidu had better visit their country. To fulfil this invitation, he decided to leave for Europe in the summer of 1932.

Naidu sailed from Colombo on the *Georges Phillippar*, a French luxury liner on its maiden

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voyage. He was accompanied by two other friends. Suddenly the boat which was an *oil burner* caught fire, five days after she had left Colombo. In the mid-ocean the blazing vessel floated in a helpless manner. When he knew that the ship was ablaze, Naidu did not think of saving himself first! He spent nearly three hours wandering about on board in search of his friends and he jumped into the sea for a life-boat only after he was assured that the friends had gone on another life-boat in perfect safety. He was also responsible to save the lives of two women, one of English and another of Chinese nationality. He and his fellow passengers were finally rescued by a Russian oil-tanker and landed at Djibouti. He continued the journey afterwards without any event. The burning of the *Georges Phillippar* had been admirably told in a letter he wrote from Manchester to a friend in South India, but the details of it need not detain us here. However, there are some lines, which are very characteristic of the man.

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He wrote :

"The incidents on the *Georges Phillippar* brought to light the varieties of human behaviour in times of distress; how in life the parents and the children are knit together and how the fear of death makes every one look to himself. I could see the dissolution of caste consciousness, local patriotism, filial affection and friendly love in this hour of trial."

First, Naidu reached Marseilles and then he went over to meet the Kuhns in Hanover, Germany. He made an extensive tour of the Continental countries, crossed the Atlantic, and visited the United States of America. Here he looked up Automobile factories, cities of importance, met famous business magnates, and inventors. He travelled first class althrough, stayed in the foremost hotels, accorded press interviews when pressed by newspapermen, talked to groups willing to learn about India. Naidu had very little command of the English language at that time. Still, he had a working knowledge of it. This, however, did not affect

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him in the tour. Once he reached the western coast of the United States, he took steamer for Japan. From there, he visited Manchuria, Korea, Mangolia, China, Indo-China, Malaya, and Ceylon on his way back home.

Naidu returned to India in 1933 via Colombo. For the first time, his name had by now got into all the newspapers of India, in connection with the *Georges Phillippar* tragedy. At Colombo, he received a telegram from many people wanting to give him a reception in Madras. Not fanciful for such honours, he declined to have it. Even then, he suspected that people would await him at the Madras train-terminus. Therefore, he got off the train at a way-side station for a day and then continued the journey. He arrived a day later, but then, the crowd anxious to see him was there! Amongst those who received him were eighty students. He did not know them but had awarded scholarships to them on the strength of their mere applications! Further, each student who received such scholarship was to keep the

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fact a secret and not tell others that he was being helped by Naidu. Therefore, even the eighty students did not know each other! Naidu also gave a monthly stipend of £ 10/- each for four students in England for many years. But everything was a quiet affair. He did what he did for the pleasure of it and not for any credit to come on him that way!

Garlands were showered on the neck of this survivor from *Georges Phillippar* tragedy! He smiled at all and the next day left for Coimbatore.

Naidu's first foreign travel experiences were crowded with hair-breadth escapes from death. The *Georges Phillippar* incident was but a minor one, compared to some others that followed. After reaching London, one day he went to Exeter. While returning, he had reserved a seat in a particular train but when he reached the rail-depot earlier and found a train ready to start, he got in. He had written to a few in London about his arrival but when they heard that particular train in which he

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had reservation crashed, they rushed up to the place of the accident. Many of them turned mourners for Naidu and some of them, not having seen him personally, sang his praise. Naidu himself was then amidst them, hearing all that they said, enjoying the fun!

Some months later, he took a 'plane from Tokyo to Korea. A powerful gale began to blow over the *Japan Sea* and the pilot lost his control in the cock-pit. He was not then sure of the fate of the craft or her passengers. Even here, Naidu was lucky in as much the 'plane somehow landed at Harbin. One could easily imagine the veracity of that gale, when we later learnt that more than 3900 homes, several thousands of lives and even some small sailing vessels in the harbour, all perished in Harbin.

Then, he came to China and was bent upon visiting the Gobi desert from Peking, the ancient city, where he minutely studied the historic *Great Wall*. The Journey to the desert had to be undertaken by *auto* and Naidu was

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warned ahead that the robber-meance widely existed in these parts. He did actually come across some at one point, but he managed to escape alright! These unwelcome experiences never made him cool down in his enthusiasm for further travel in his life. Like the happy warrior, he was all for going on and on, with determination and confidence.

Naidu now found that travel was a great book of knowledge and by travelling one learnt much in life. This impression forced him to take yet a second tour of Europe in 1936. This time he was particularly interested in studying the problem of transport in the Continental countries. Besides, every factory of importance was visited by him. Every philanthropical and charitable institution in England and the Continent received him. The whole tour lasted several months.

Like Izzak Walton's *Complete Angler*, Naidu is a complete tourist. He draws up a programme of the places he intends visiting

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before commencing the tour and he knows every detail of the place he visits. Guides are often baffled by his inquiries and none of them could kid him. A shrewd observer and keen student, he is perhaps the one Indian who has benefitted much from touring foreign countries so completely. With a fine memory, he could narrate to you everything he saw and experienced in a picturesque manner. And he always carried with him his movie-camera, which recorded everything and left out nothing!

For some years, the camera was his constant companion wherever he went. He photographed not only many great men of the world but scenic splendours too, in many parts of the world, industrial units and even the important marvels of the skies. Photography had been a kind of passion with him, that way, in his youth, but he has now completely given it up!

During his second visit to Europe, he had the opportunity of filming several celebrities:

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who made world history during the last decade. In 1935, he was in England when London turned sad one day at the death of King George V. There was an imposing funeral procession and Naidu's 16 m. m. camera recorded a part of it. There was a stampede in the streets, as the cortege left the Buckingham Palace in which one died, 150 persons removed to hospital and 10,000 people given first aid by the ambulance services. Such a confusion did not prevent him in the least from freely going about clicking the camera. He had everything filmed, as far as he could.

A few months later, there was an Olympic Exhibition. It lasted for ten days. One day, Naidu was invited by the British Automobile interests to deliver a lecture on *diesel engines*. On another day, King Edward VIII (the present Duke of Windsor) visited the Exhibition but none else was to be allowed during the Royal visit. The Indian had gone up to see His Majesty arrive and taken his stand at the gate to

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photograph him. Ladies lined up in the front row of spectators. He asked a couple of them to allow him a little space to thrust in the camera and record the King's arrival. They agreed. When His Majesty actually arrived at the gate and alighted from his car, Naidu rushed up to the very road itself, crossing even the pavement, to have a close-up picture of the smiling King. A policeman near about then caught hold of him by the neck and attempted to remove him from the scene, when His Majesty himself graciously intervened and ordered that he should not be troubled. Once the King said that much, he grew very courageous indeed and right away followed him into the Exhibition grounds along with the Lord Mayor. He filmed the entire royal visit to the Exhibition Pavilion that day, lasting for about an hour. The result was a 400 feet documentary film record in twenty minutes' time and it is a treasure with him today.

When Naidu went over to Germany early in 1936 he met Hitler. He asked the German



ADOLF HITLER

— *An autographed Portrait*

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Chancellor to pose for pictures and he willingly agreed. He then, took a few feet of film. Some *still pictures* obtained from the exposure, were presented to the famous German the same day and he gave him his autograph on one of them.

Years later, when Naidu was in the United States at the commencement of the Second World War, he casually showed those photographs to some American friends. They were so excited to see them, that one man actually offered ten thousand dollars to buy the one on which the Fuhrer had autographed! Naidu declined the offer, of course! Photography never meant anything to him in monetary values. That picture is still with him. He also photographed Hitler *driving in state* through the streets of Cologne one day.

Naidu casually made a study of Hitler's face from the pictures that he took. They revealed many amazing features. For one thing, the Fuhrer's two pictures were never

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alike; his facial expressions were never identical! 'The camera does not lie', they said, but when you looked at the photographs of Hitler, you began doubting that old saying! In one of the pictures taken, his face was rather pretty, Naidu thought. Yet in another, recorded a few seconds later, his face was the *ugliest* that Naidu's camera ever recorded! Equally, his facial expressions were also varied!

During Naidu's stay in Germany he had the pleasure of meeting for the first time Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, during one of his sad periods in life. He had just been out of prison in India and had gone over with his wife Kamala for treatment at a nursing-home in Baden Weiler. Naidu often went to that nursing home, to quietly inquire from the nurses how Kamala Nehru's health was, though he had not met her or her distinguished husband till then. This had become, more or less, a daily routine affair with him, since he happened to be staying in that town for a

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holiday at that time. One fine morning as Naidu was coming out of the nursing home, he found Pandit Nehru entering and to him, he made a casual inquiry about his wife's progress. His camera at once recorded the Indian leader. His was then a *care-worn face* and it was as solemn as that of a priest, engaged in a high-pitched religious ritual. Wearing a felt-hat and a thick green *blazer* with broad stripes, Pandit Nehru looked a *dandy* on that occasion! He was all acute feelings within himself then and of few words with any! A glimpse of him Naidu's camera caught, was shown him later on in the day and he was good enough to sign an autograph on it!

After the demise of Kamala Nehru, Panditji was in London and was honoured at several social functions. Naidu too had gone back to England by that time and his camera recorded several pictures of functions held in his honour. At the Caxton Hall, Naidu had Panditji and the late Mr. C. F. Andrews pose for him to take some pictures. Alike, at an

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evening party in the Indian Students Union in Gower Street, he had a full record of the occasion filmed.

A couple of years later, Naidu was visiting the Tripuri Congress where Mr. Subhas Chandra Bose presided. When he went about with the camera filming important Congressmen, some of the volunteers objected, but he finally managed to see the Chairman of the Reception Committee and had his *photographic-freedom* restored! When he went near Pandit Nehru's tent one morning, he met his Secretary Upadhyaya with whom he had a cordial chat. As they stood conversing, Panditji emerged from his tent. He had such a good memory and recollection for old faces that he at once smiled and greeted Naidu in familiar fashion. Naidu photographically recorded this meeting too.

Though not in good health, Subhas Chandra Bose as President of the Tripuri Congress stood still for several minutes at

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Naidu's request before the camera to record some of his facial expressions. Alike, he had also Gandhiji held up once or twice to be filmed. On such occasions, Gandhiji used to be full of witty remarks.

The man who felt himself most delightful before a camera amongst the European statesmen he filmed was none other than Mussolini. After an interview with him, Naidu asked him for a pose. He said that not only he would give him one pose but was prepared to stand for several! Mussolini, then casually asked of what use would be made with his pictures taken, to which Naidu quietly replied: "The best use possible".

"Not in the wrong direction, I suppose?", the Duce cautiously inquired smilingly and yet suspiciously, as they shook hands and parted.

In London he wanted to test the efficiency of the Postmen, about whom he was told a lot. He went over to Birmingham and posted a letter addressed to himself thus:

G. D. NAIDU, LONDON, W.C. 1.

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The letter did reach him in due course and he was impressed with the fact that the Postmen in London were really efficient! On another occasion he lost his camera somewhere in the Metropolis, but the Lost Property Office restored it to him in no time! Again, he put a trunk-telephone call to India but instead of getting five minutes to talk, he said he got only three minutes, though he was charged for five minutes! He wrote to the controller of Telephones about it and when a refund of £ 2/- was awarded to him, he charitably turned it over to the *Boxing Day* collections of the London Telephone Services Distress Fund!

This time he had planned to visit Europe, extensively. All the principal countries of Europe were toured. Being a planned itinerary, he saw everything and missed nothing worthwhile in all those countries.

He was particularly interested to visit Russia. He did not like the nose-led tours of Russian factories and he plainly confessed

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about it. In an article contributed to a *Calcutta Weekly*, he summed up his impressions of Russia in an admirable narrative, portions of which I reproduce below.

"When I first heard all about Communism, I read the relevant literature pertaining to it from Karl Marx downwards. Not satisfied, I longed to personally pay a visit to Moscow, the Mecca of Communism, to see whether this particular creed had brought atleast some happiness to Soviet humanity. It was with that idea that in October 1935 I visited Russia. From Tallinn (capital of Estonia) I took an air-plane and travelled to Leningrad and of course my journey was arranged through the *Intourist*, the regular Russian Travel Agency.

"I tried to talk to a lot of people in Russia but they would not freely talk at all! I often wondered whether *dumbness* was a freely prevalent disease among Moscow's citizens.

"After spending four days in Moscow, having been somewhat dumb-founded myself by the dismal picture of Soviet life as I saw it in that city, I virtually

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fled from Russia. I got into a non-stop aeroplane from Moscow to Berlin one fine morning. The reason why I had to leave so quickly was due to my firm feeling then that I would either be poisoned or killed any moment in Moscow! Atleast that was what my *Intourist* guide told me.

"Now a country and its people who believe in showmanship and play *Jekyll and Hyde* before foreign visitors, must be very hypocritical, I thought, and from what little I saw in Moscow and Leningrad and even during the short railway trip I had southwards, I was not convinced that the Russian worker was made to feel a *Paradise* of his life in the Communist regime. If in Russia itself that was the state of affairs, I can hardly believe that any Communist state anywhere else on earth could be a place ideal enough for the happiness of the working classes! Fourteen years have passed by, since I was on the *Red-soil* of Russia, but I do continue to wonder whether during this short time they had managed to achieve any miracle for the worker, different from the conditions I saw with my own eyes!"

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In Germany, he had many amazing experiences with the Nazis. He wrote to Hitler asking for an interview, but the Fuhrer said that he had no time. A few days later when Naidu was in Cologne the whole batch of those Nazi Chiefs arrived at the *Dom Hotel*. Naidu was staying there, then. Hitler too was in the batch. Seizing this opportunity as fine, Naidu renewed his request to meet the Dictator and a meeting then took place just for few minutes. Dr. Ley acted as an interpreter between them. Hitler and Naidu talked of the latter's visit to Germany. "We never talked any politics", said Naidu to an inquirer. "After all, what politics could I talk with him?"

Hitler, along with Goering, Ley, Hess and Goebbels posed before the movie-camera which Naidu clicked. The Fuhrer also gave the Indian an autographed picture of his. "I met all those Nazi Chiefs", Naidu said. "I also talked with Ley for long. He spoke perfect English".

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Next day to meeting Hitler, Naidu was arrested for filming the German army goose-stepping through Dusseldorf, but when he told the officials that he was no *militia-man* engaged in any espionage work and that photography was his hobby, he was let off! The *Gestapo* treated him with courtesy and kindness, he said.

Early in April, he returned to India by the P. & O. mail boat *Strathmore*. Aboard travelled the Marquis and Marchioness of Linlithgow, and the six Indian passengers then got up an address of welcome to the *Viceroy-designate*. Naidu filmed the occasion and personally made the acquaintance of His Lordship.

VI

IN U. S. A.

Wander-lust now seriously seized Naidu. He tasted the fruits of extensive travel rather well. He also knew it widened his mental horizon. His automobile business had been left in the hands of capable men in Coimbatore, and he wished to travel about and study more and more. Once again he was planning for a tour abroad and in 1939, he actually sailed away for Europe. A few months were spent in England. When he arrived in England, Hitler declared war and the United Kingdom was in a state of uneasiness. However, Naidu had plans to visit the New York *World Fair* in October 1939 and sailed for the *New World*. Arriving in New York, he took up residence in the *Commodore*, one of the most palatial hotels in that Metropolis. It was a very costly hotel and it was more so, during the period of the *Fair*. "When I left, I paid in tips alone seventy dollars", he wrote to a friend in India,

explaining what tipping was like in the States. But he did not mind!

In New York, his had been a very systematic life. For ten days he attended the *Fair* regularly. He visited everything worth visiting, except the amusement section. He at first made a keen observation of the various booths, then studied them and took pictures of everything he saw. He exposed four thousand feet of film here, collected fourteen thousand folders for posting to friends in India and took detailed notes of all that he saw and felt. Though this was his second visit to New York he now made closer observations of everything he found here. He wrote to friends everything he saw. "Here, in New York, there are no level crossings, no gates", he wrote. "People are so educated that they know as to when a train just approaches", Again he was struck by the fact that one could travel a thousand miles in an American train and yet come out of the carriage with a clean shirt. He was amazed to find in New York petrol selling at fifteen cents

a gallon, which in Indian currency roughly worked out at seven annas! By the way, he also consulted a Dr. Pickard, famous physician, for treating stomach troubles from which Naidu suffered for long. Then he left New York for Chicago.

He writes thus of his days in New York:

"I regularly went to the Exhibition, I was always the first man to enter and the last to leave. Every day I left after breakfast and never ate anything till evening".

From Chicago, he moved on to St. Louis in Missouri. He went there with the chief object of entering a school. He took up residence in the 'Fair Grounds Hotel'. This is perhaps the one American town where he spent a few weeks continuously.

The winter weather in St. Louis at that time was rather hard. The mercury registered 11° below zero but Naidu persisted in going out with his usual Indian dress consisting of a dhoti, shirt, pull-over and upper cloth! In

such a weather he did not even take regular meals. He writes to a friend thus:

"One day I started some work at nine o'clock in the morning and until the next day at 12, I had no food or sleep - not even a glass of water - although everything was available where I lived."

He slept regularly for four hours only in a day, while the rest of the hours were devoted to the visits, writing, correspondence, photography and study. Here, he joined a technical school in January 1940. The Carter Carburettor School in St. Louis was famous and Naidu took advantage of his presence in the City to prosecute his studies in it. The school trained up each month forty students spending on each nearly two hundred dollars. Naidu, attired in his Indian dress, attended this school and received training by lectures and practical work in the laboratory. He also received a stipend of sixteen dollars a week. Imagine this Indian for the first time in his fortyseventh year going to school! Few would have the spirit and the aptitude for such a task amongst South Indians at such an age!

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"Students of this school are not ordinary men", Naidu wrote to a friend in India, "but I was the only man without any engineering qualifications!" Explaining to another friend as to why he went schooling in St. Louis, he wrote :

"No doubt, I have done very hard work. I have earned what I wanted and there is no necessity of any more hard work with any risk but I got this feeling when I was very weak. After I recovered, my mind would not lose any chance to learn in order to help others".

For a time he attended this educational institution. He was the first Indian to study there. When he left, he gave a written message of greetings to the school in Tamil! It was widely published in newspapers.

Outside the school hours, Naidu accepted several speaking engagements. In one of those gatherings a collection was taken to pay the lecturer in the typical American manner, but he politely declined to accept the amount. He spoke to his audiences on spiritual, philosophical and sociological matters from an

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Indian's point of view, "Whenever I sit at rest for a few minutes the people around usually gather to ask questions about India", he wrote to a friend in Coimbatore. "And when you are asked questions with such interest you cannot refuse them".

He told enquirers in India that most Americans were anxious to know about India and the people out there were very cordial, friendly and good-natured. He liked their behaviour and found them intelligent. But he also found that in spiritual and philosophical matters, they were behind Indians in their knowledge. He viewed that the Americans were more advanced than any other people in the world of Science and Industry.

"Don't deceive any one, including yourself", he told an audience and proceeded, "don't steal from others. including yours. Abstain from alcohol. Don't waste, keep healthy, have morality, natural beauty. Hinduism stands on these foundations". Yet he told a second audience: "Other countries have many enemies but for the the United States, the greatest enemies are *Mr. Smoker* and *Miss. Smokie.*"

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A modern hair-dressing, beautiful clothes, powdered and painted lips do not constitute beauty, he told yet another group of people who listened to him.

“If you feel in your conscience that you are polite, honest and righteous, well, that is the real beauty!”

In one meeting he addressed, he found every one present having pro-Nazi feelings. When Naidu finished his speech, they asked him all sorts of questions.

“How many of you had been to Germany?”, Naidu questioned his interrupters. There was perfect silence for a while. “Well, I know every nook and corner of that country so well”, he assured them, and proceeded to convince his hearers that all was not well with the Nazis. Strange enough, the whole audience believed Naidu, and changed their views about Hitlerite Germany.

At Davenport, he spent ten days observing everything in a film projector factory. “I enjoyed much of what all I saw here”, he said.

In the same town, he was once arrested by the police because some women seeing him in Indian dress, complained that there was a man about the town in scanty articles of apparel! Naidu calmly submitted when he was taken into custody! He inquired of them sarcastically whether they were "Gangsters or G-men!" Within a few minutes the Police realized their mistake, apologized and set him free!

To a Pressman in Salt Lake City he said:

"Our people take Great Britain in this War. We hate Germany, Italy and Japan because they choke small nations!"

Naidu had his days to play too in St. Louis! Once he accompanied a few friends to the zoo. He stood near the cage having reptiles. He mesmerized a snake. If he went to one corner of the cage the snake moved towards that side. His American friends were fully astonished to see the cobra labouring thus under Naidu's psychic power!

Even in India, Naidu had ordered his workmen not to kill any cobra if they

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encountered one anywhere. One day a huge snake appeared in the office and his men reported that it would not go into the clay pot as usual when a pot was held up. Then he telephoned that he himself was coming. He stood there and asked a man to take the obstinate reptile in, and it coolly entered the pot which was then removed.

Naidu had for long interested himself in hypnotism, mesmerism and spiritualism. He had read the works of Conan Doyle and Oliver Lodge early. He had practised these psychic feats now and then. He was also a good student of astrology but did not believe that everything for man depended upon that! He said that most astrologers were thought-readers. Once he cornered an astrological pundit in Madras while reading the future fate of a friend from a sheaf of palm leaves. Naidu promptly stopped him after a few verses had been sung and asked him to read them again. The man blinked. He could not repeat the verses and he confessed that he was not reading anything

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from the palm leaves and what was uttered came to him through some kind of an inspiration! Similarly, Naidu does not believe in that thing called *Luck*! Edison is reported to have once said that everything was accomplished through *ninety per cent of perspiration and ten per cent of inspiration* and Naidu believed that cent per cent of anything came through inspiration by which he meant planned, hard work. If one worked hard, everything came to him, he believes. If things did not turn up well, then the method of working must be faulty, he says.

Naidu was in Chicago on New Year Day, 1940. He stayed in an aristocratic hotel in that city and there was great rejoicing. Drinking and dancing and shouts of mirth rent the air. Naidu, of course, joined the crowd in good spirit but then, neither drinking nor dancing pleased him! Whenever he left on his European trips, he carefully wrote out a chit swearing that he would not touch "meat, alcohol or women", on the foreign soil! This

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chit he had carefully kept in his purse and at the Hotel, he took it out and often looked through it that night! Now at the *New Year Day Ball* in the Hotel, he was a mere grand spectator of what was going on. It was past midnight when revelries ceased and everyone was seen retiring to their apartments. Naidu went to his. No sooner he did, his door was knocked. He opened and found to his great surprise four beautiful women in their *lingeries* wanting to walk into his room! They were dead drunk. They threw their hands upon him and one attempted to even shower kisses! He warded off all such attempts from them, led them gently out of his room to the corridor and shut the door quietly but they came back and forcibly opened the door! Naidu was amazed. One said to him, "Listen, if you don't like me, take my friend!" And all said the same words! Finally, they all, under the daze of alcohol, one by one, dropped on the floor and slept off in his room. He kept awake the whole night watching the fun. The next morning all of them, dressed up came to Naidu

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and apologised, saying that they did not know what had happened, because, once wine had gone into the head pretty strong, it was pardonable to be riotous on such occasions! And what was Naidu, if not the man of strong will-power? One of them later on wrote him a letter tenderly telling that she even wished to marry him, a request which greatly amused him. He wrote to her in return that American girls should not marry Indians unless they had lived in India and studied Indian conditions first!

Naidu's correspondence to friends in India from America was done on a large scale. He had much to write and he found the need for a *good steno* whom he employed, paying twenty to thirty dollars a week. He was also booking orders with several American businessmen for electrical and mechanical goods. His volume of correspondence thus increased as day succeeded day. Once a slight stenographic error cost him 180 dollars! Naidu himself could type out letters but then, he took a lot of

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time to finish each of them and he was not for wasting precious time! But the American steno-woman often blundered in typing out Indian names and many a comic error had crept up that way. Once his *steno* typed out an address thus:

*"Retired Communist. Extension,
Coimbatore"!*

A letter which he himself received from a New York businessman was addressed thus:

*"United Motors, Coimbatore,
G. B. Naidu,
Room 855.
Chicago, Ills.*

A very hard worker, even in St. Louis, Naidu subsisted on scanty meals each day with the simplicity of a saint. Writing to a friend he observed:

"Morning, noon and night it was the same cup of tomato juice, four figs and a cereal. The cereal in the morning was actually oat-meal or corn-flakes or puffed rice. I have no objection to eating eggs and I think they are the same as milk but I am afraid the cooks here use the same spoon for meat dishes too!

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He said that food was expensive and that a glass of tomato juice costed as much as thirty cents, for which amount two good meals could be obtained in *India*!

Naidu was also a head-line darling with the pressmen in St. Louis and other towns he visited. He was regularly interviewed and his photographs were published prominently in several newspapers in the United States. His visits to business centres, to inventors like Alexander Victor (the man who designed the 16 m. m. camera), all were photographed and published by the newspapers. Headlines such as "Hindu frowns on lips, heels of women in U. S." appeared prominently on their pages. Jackson D. Hag, a reporter of the *Detroit News* interviewed him in 1932 and took a picture of him too. Now, in 1940 when Naidu was there again, the same photo appeared and the feature story about the visitor was written by none else than Hag!

The blaze of publicity focussed on him by the American press annoyed him. "I could

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not be bothered with interviews and publicity", he said. "Generally, people liked publicity in the newspapers, but here in America, if anything is published, it is very troublesome. Men and women immediately call to make appointments for lunches and dinners".

During this trip to America Naidu experienced a few unexpected difficulties. His stomach trouble was there. Then, he also had to face the difficulty arising from shortage of cash in hands. Due to the war, large remittances from India to the United States were forbidden. When he was in St. Louis, he received a telegram from his office in Coimbatore saying that ten thousands had been remitted through the Imperial Bank but the Bank objected to the remittance! Upon receipt of this telegram, I was very much annoyed", records Naidu in a letter he then wrote to some one. "For weeks I cut short all my expenses and did not attend to any business. Until then, I booked only about ten thousand dollars worth goods"! But the American businessmen gave fair terms to him.

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The Indianapolis machinery Company and others told him that the goods could be paid for "soon after the arrival of Mr. Naidu in India during the next several months!"

Mr. H. S. Mallick, the then Indian Trade Commissioner in New York, and presently Indian Ambassador in Paris, was approached. He said that he could arrange for some remittance from India that would actually cover Naidu's return passage home! Somehow, affairs were well managed later.

Then, towards the end of 1940, he returned to India, travelling through the Far East. At Cochin, the customs officials took more than five days to examine all his baggage. His 37,000 letters alone engaged a good deal of the time of the officials to read through and digest! In the meantime this delay was interpreted to mean that Naidu was a *Pro-German*! This was the handiwork of some of his enemies, the police officials, but the rumour died pretty soon, as rumours always did!

VII

NO POLITICS

The war placed a check on the industrial and scientific activities of Naidu. He went to America to learn and once he returned with fresh knowledge and many plans to further his industrial pursuits, he found himself completely shut out from free communications with foreign countries. Soon after his return he wrote to the then Commerce Member to the Government of India intimating him that he could easily manufacture five-valve Radio sets in India at seventy rupees apiece. That was in March 1941. In July, he actually had a Radio Factory declared open at Coimbatore by Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chetti. Naidu had plans to manufacture 300 sets a month but again, the war situation had come on his way. Nevertheless, the factory is carrying on its work in its own modest way.

Besides, he had been interested in doing his bit towards war effort. Recounting the experiences of his tour, he addressed a large

meeting in Coimbatore on his return. He then gave a rinsing of his travel experiences and pleaded with his countrymen to help in the war effort of Britain, expressing the hope that the British people would finally have the day of victory. As a token of his own support to the Province's War Fund collections, he in 1941, entertained Governor Sir Arthur Hope at a garden party and handed over to him a donation for war funds.

Naidu's politics had been the talk in many quarters. Many said that he was a staunch Justicite and hated the Brahmins! When he was questioned on this issue, he replied that he had no hatred of any particular man or community in the world, though there had been, in the earlier days, causes for him to dislike some people. "I had two Brahmins in my employment when I commenced business", he said "and one of them swindled me of a large amount, betraying the trust I reposed in him. The other equally misbehaved, but when he sought pardon, I kept him on in service"! In

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London, he came across a bright Brahmin youth during his second trip. He was in difficulties to continue his studies. Naidu did not hesitate to give him a £ 10/- a month scholarship until he finished his college in England. Today, the young man is holding a decent high position in the M. S. M. Railway offices.

For two years Naidu was a member of the Palani Municipal Council. He was also a member of the Coimbatore Municipal Council. During the provincial general elections in 1936, he contested a seat from Coimbatore for the Madras Legislative Council and was defeated by a Congressman. Explaining this election affair he said that he contested the seat only because he gave word ahead to the Rajah of Bobbili. The conduct of this election was a scandalous affair on the part of those who ran it and there were rumours that the polling boxes were tampered with. This election, more than anything else, drove Naidu to invent the machine for recording votes and with it,

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tampering would become an impossibility. A large sum was spent by him then, because Naidu, once determined to fight, fought hard to the full. He is also a *cheerful loser* like Thomas Lipton in a yacht-race.

The truth about Naidu's politics is that he is not seriously a 'political' at all. He never belonged to any political party at any time. His role in our national life has been that of an industrialist and inventor, also of an educationist. He never aspired to win laurels in the sphere of politics now or before. But he supported cause that struck him righteous. That would not be politics, you know! After all, an inventor every inch would be unsuited to the cuts and thrusts of politics, such as that which we have in South India today. Need this truth be told to a genius of practical understanding like Naidu? He only wished to tackle tasks legitimate to his sphere.

While Mr. Naidu was staying at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago, an American

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business man in Mr. F. Draper, Vice-President of the Warner Electric Company, wrote him a letter. A relevant portion from it is of interest to us here. He wrote :

"I want to take this occasion, Mr. Naidu, to let you know how much I appreciate your visit. I want to say that I shall count the hours I spent with you as some of the best I have spent in my life. I feel I had an opportunity to learn a great deal from you and I wish I had the strength and the power to follow your 'way of life' to some extent at least".

VIII

THE PLAY-BOY

To Naidu, life is a sort of comedy, So it seems! He is an incorrigible optimist with a big reservoir of mental and physical energy. One night I sat talking with him till two of the clock. The next morning when I woke up at six, he was ready to get out for work after tea. He looked then as fresh as a youth, smiling. Fatigue, he knows not; rest, he does not crave for. Work he welcomes, hard work! The mission of this man in life is to go on working his days, he says. But then, he is not that type of individual who goes with a wry face, grinness and all. He is full of humour. This sort of a combination of qualities is rare among people in South India. Some consider this middle-aged genius to be a typical *play-boy*. Indeed, he is fond of playing with pranks with his friends always. But he sees to it that these pranks do not end in vexation on the part of any.

The Play-Boy

One day, he had sent out invitations for tea in the name of his friend Dewan Bahadur C. S. Rathnasabapathy Mudaliar, an important Coimbatore citizen, who knew nothing about it. Responding to the invitation, a number of people had turned up in the evening at his residence. Quietly, Naidu too turned up. Mudaliar also came home and was astonished to find men, dressed in their best for a Party crowding his lawn. On enquiry, they said that they had come in response to his cordial invitation! Mudaliar was amazed beyond measure. Just then Naidu told the guests that Mudaliar was not properly playing the game! He invited all the guests to go to his house where tea was ready for the hundred assembled! The Party merrily went on! The day was April 1!

Then there was the case of Mr. Vellingiri Gounder. On his election as President of the District Board, people said that he was a *strong man* who could not be shaken from that position. In the next election, Naidu playfully

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set up a candidate against him. The majority of votes which Gounder secured in the previous election was shaken. This time votes were equal between Gounder and his rival. Three years later, a nominee of Naidu as President of District Board won. Gounder was a Congressman and the first Congress Ministry was in power in Madras at that time! There was no malice in the whole affair on the part of Naidu. He was just playing a game like a good sportsman.

Again in 1936, Dewan Bahadur C. S. Rathnasabapathy Mudaliar was responding to the call of Coimbatore Congressmen to return his *Dewan Bahadur* title to the Government. He had even printed letter-heads minus the title! Naidu walked into his house, called him to his house, gave him a dinner and asked him how he could so easily part with the title earned for services rendered to the people over a range of several years! Naidu well knew that good man that Mudaliar was, he was merely surrendering the title to please some of his

The Play-Boy

friends who asked him to do so. But for Naidu's intervention, the title would have been returned. But then, Mudaliar, later on, received the distinction of C. B. E. too!

In April 1944, Naidu celebrated the marriage of his daughter in Coimbatore, a function at which Sir Arthur Hope, the Governor was also present. The marriage itself was a very simple affair. No priest conducted any ceremony here. The bride Sarojini and the bridegroom Balakrishnan themselves wanted everything to be simple in those difficult times. They exchanged rings and garlands and became man and wife.

Speeches were made on the occasion. His Excellency spoke a few words and recalled a fine old English anecdote. He said that when a couple got married, they agreed to leave all the major decisions in their life to the man and the minor ones to the wife. His Excellency said smilingly and good-humouredly that he himself was married for a pretty long time, but

then, in his own life, no major decisions had ever been taken!

Friends of Naidu were astonished at the simplicity of the wedding ceremony. There were no feasting arrangements or pompous celebrations. There was a tea party only. Some one told him that he should atleast give the guests cocoanuts. "Why not mangoes and sugar candy instead?", retorted Naidu. That is the way his mind worked in these matters. Surely, his will had the way. Only mangoes and candy were given after all!

In 1927, he had married a second time - Ranganayaki Ammal. He has two daughters by his first marriage and both of them are married. By his second marriage he has a son aged nine, a charming boy with whom the father often cuts jokes and he too well responds. Visitors to *Gopal Bagh* are always pleased to see this boy who talks Telugu and Tamil well. Though Mr. Naidu talks at home Telugu with his family folk, he says that his mother tongue

The Play-Boy

is Tamil. In the family circle, relatives are free with him. He never makes them feel conscious of his importance. I saw him one day talking with his son-in-law as if he were his young friend. But then, freedom did not lapse into anything loose. Everyone had the proper respect for the man. The only thing is that Naidu does not demand it from them, though they have it. Such respect all the citizens of Coimbatore give him. He is also the most feared man, most loved and hated, the best known man of his town.

IX

PHILANTHROPIST

It is said of that great American Eugene Mayer, the well known Jewish financier and owner of the newspaper *Washington Post*, that he planned his own life when he was still an under-graduate at Yale. He wanted his first twenty years after graduation to be devoted to making money, the next twenty for public services and the third two decades to be spent in contemplative retirement. A similar planned life has been adopted by Naidu. So it seems. Perhaps the order with this Indian had been that he would have his first twenty-five years in life to *learn* everything possible, then the second twenty-five to *earn* everything he could, and then have the rest of his years in the service of the people. Therefore, it was in keeping up with this plan perhaps, that he decided to retire from active working as far as his huge automobile combine was concerned, at the age of fifty. The announcement of this news came on the ninth day of January 1944.

Philanthropist

On that day, he had invited Sir Arthur Hope, the Governor of Madras to visit Coimbatore and lunch with him. The Governor arrived with his daughter and an assembly of many distinguished faces was seen around the lunch table in *Gopal Bagh*.

After the meal, Naidu rose to thank His Excellency for kindly responding to his invitation. Then he made a detailed speech, a very remarkable speech indeed, in the course of which he spoke about himself and his activities, how he built up the automobile combine from small beginnings to its present day prominence. He also announced that he handed over the active management of the combine from that day onwards to different hands.

Marking the occasion, he handed over to the Governor a cheque for a lakh and ten thousand rupees as his contribution to the Provincial Governor's War Fund. He also announced that he had invested about a million

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rupees in defence loans to the Government, and the proceeds of it turned over to various items of philanthropy he considered worthy. Allotments for the welfare of his auto-workers, for labour welfare in the Province, for upliftment work among the Depressed Classes, a newspaper for the down-trodden folks of his Province, formed the various items of his philanthropical benefactions announced that day. He also set apart handsome amounts of money for research scholarships in the technical fields of radio and automobile engineering also, at the Pachiappa's College, Ramakrishna Home and the Andhra University.

Practically, much of his earnings spread over a period of a quarter of a century, Naidu now allotted to various deserving causes philanthropically. Few in India would have done similarly, few indeed would have had the vision and magnanimity, as possessed by this Industrial Scientist. I have known men who endowed for educational institutions and other charities in South India, but any dispassionate

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judge of these philanthropies must particularly offer praise to Naidu, for his is the best form of philanthropy to be ranked with few parallels, especially when we think of the fact that he has given his almost everything! The deserved appreciation of this generosity of Naidu won a meed of praise from none other than Governor Hope on that occasion.

Sir Arthur, rising to reply to the speech from Naidu, paid the Industrial Scientist glowing tributes. He said :

“I think that Mr. Naidu very much represents Coimbatore in every way. As he has just said, he started in a small way and has now grown into a very big man. Coimbatore, no doubt, started in a small way and has certainly become a very big city; and only a short time ago I have been told by one person at this function that until he came down to the South he never heard of Coimbatore! I am quite certain that before many years are passed, Coimbatore will be known throughout the world in the same way as Bombay or Madras or Delhi. It is people like Mr. Naidu who have got the town on the

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map, and I do most sincerely congratulate him on the wonderful things he has done during the course of not a very long life. I want to thank him very much indeed for these magnificent donations, both the investment in war bonds and the philanthropic and charitable gifts which he has given.

“In England, we have a gentleman rather similar to Mr. Naidu called Lord Nuffield who has given an enormous amount of money always for good objects out of the profits made in his Concern; and although Mr. Naidu may not be thinking of Lord Nuffield, he is doing the same thing indeed. I do appreciate it enormously; it is a wonderful example quite apart from the monetary value of the gift, and I am sure that anybody in all parts of India can take that example to heart and do what they can, not only for the war fund but also for the needs of the poor and the suffering. I appreciate his gifts enormously, they will be used as Mr. Naidu wishes, and I am perfectly certain that he is giving an example which will be followed by many not only in this Presidency but throughout the country.”

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The speech over, Daughter Sarojini proposed a vote of thanks to the Governor and Miss Hope. It was indeed a proud day, then, for the family of this self-made genius inventor of Coimbatore, whose life and deeds fill the mind of thousands with admiration in India today.

X

IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

A new chapter in the life of Naidu began with his retirement from a very active life connected with his transport business. He had risen in life from humble beginnings, he had earned a modest wealth and now, according to plan, he was all for devoting his money to the well-being of the people amidst whom he lived. Besides being individually a prominent Transport businessman in India, Naidu's interests are as varied as that of a versatile artist. For one thing, he has been always a passionate advocate of technical education for the masses and he saw salvation for the country only through that channel of instruction more than in turning out *Bachelors of Art* by thousands by our Universities and Colleges! None could dispute his contention. We have seen it in a practical way that the man with some kind of a technical education always had a footing to hand on rather than the *jack of all trades*, the raw University graduate, branded for clerical

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position only in 98 out of 100 cases! Naidu knew this more than anybody else, himself a living concrete example for the rise of a *practical man* to great success in life. With such ideas surging in his mind, he was keen on doing his part to see more institutions imparting technical education coming into being, but then the Government of Madras had views of its own! He found the Government so prosaic, so indifferent to practical measures, so ununderstanding of the vital needs in the sphere of education, that Naidu thought the government machinery would not move unless private individuals like him showed a personal interest in the matter by themselves commencing educational institutions of the kind. So, we saw the birth of two useful technical schools in Naidu's own town of Coimbatore in 1945. Sir Arthur Hope, the British Governor of the Province at that time, knew the value of technical education well and was in agreement with the views of Naidu. So, he himself did his part in seeing these institutions coming into existence in the quickest possible manner.

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The result was marvellous. We then saw the establishment of the Arthur Hope Polytechnic as well as a college of engineering called as Arthur Hope College of Technology with the munificence of a few lakhs of rupees Naidu himself cheerfully donated. These institutions are thriving today. In the Hope Polytechnic, Naidu himself was appointed Honorary Director and Principal on account of the dearth of suitable hands, well qualified on the subjects taught. He accepted the position cheerfully, for, he considered education to be a vital mission in his life.

The technical institutions, Naidu had helped to come into existence, he wanted to utilize towards the industrial glory of India. Throughout the country, we have big financiers with pots of money. Joint stock companies could be floated in a day to do this and that, but the whole question was, whether we have sufficiently able men who could turn out everything that are now produced in this country and abroad, efficiently and cheaply.

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This is still a problem of problems to be seriously taken into account. Now, here is a man in Naidu who has the brains but when he moves in to do anything useful to nation, seeking the co-operation of the public or Government, he had met with more obstacles than aid and it is a constant wonder to me, why it should be so !

Naidu wanted to manufacture *Iron lungs* in this country. Lord Nuffield in England had sent to India quite a few of these essential medical apparatus as a gift for some of our hospitals. Now, the *Nuffield of India* thought that he could get some of them from the United States at a very cheap price and supply them to a few hospitals. No, it is not made easy for him to do it! He has to go through the regular ordeal of a petty business man who trades on vaseline! He is to fill in a form to get the import licence and once it is got, secure the *dollars* needed. He does not shirk doing all that and comply with the law. But, by the time the dollars were allotted to him, the

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validity of the licence he got expired and once the licence got renewed, the time allotted for the dollars was over! Between such *sixes and sevens*, Naidu had to encounter scores of petty worries and here is a standing example of how the administration based on *red-tape* prevents practical results and practical utility to the nation.

I have referred to Naidu being treated in a very unbecoming manner by the Government of Madras and the Government of India in some ways, whenever he attempted to do something good for the people. Here are a few instances, that I remember. They are all true. Years ago, when he applied for a licence to construct a very decent bus stand for his transport business, the Government would not allow him to do it. When he introduced transport automobiles well-equipped with standards obtained in Europe and America, licence to ply those vehicles were cancelled! When he introduced modern *recording machines* relating to the arrival and departure of buses in his

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office, even that was viewed with disapproval by the Government. The reason for all that is this. The Government frame rules and regulations in these matters, but Naidu goes one step further and thinks more of the comfort and well - being of those who travelled in his transports. The Government officers do not like any one this way showing them the lead because they believe that the lead should come from them and them alone, though ordinarily, it does not come or if coming, came in the wrong way. How to beat it?

Naidu is the pioneer in India to open the first factory to manufacture electric motors. When he sought Government permission for raw materials, he was refused. Foreign-made motors were not arriving in war time and the Government had to somehow agree to his proposal. Though the factory was allowed to come into being the Government insisted that no non-ferrous metal should be supplied to this factory! Naidu thought it might have been due to the want of confidence of the Govern-

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ment in any Indian to manufacture an *electric motor*! But was Naidu a fake inventor? Were not some of his inventions awarded prizes in the famous Lepzeig Fair and other German exhibitions? Now this motor factory had turned out thousands and thousands of electric motors and were used by every one so profitably. They are so efficient and so cheap! Still, the value of it all, was never recognised by Indian industrialists adequately. The British Industrialists on coming to know about this enterprise approached him for agency, while no Indian concern is keen to profit by what an Indian factory is doing in Coimbatore! Further more, Naidu had plans to manufacture automobiles and machine tools. Even here, the stamping foot of the government was evident, besides the unsympathetic attitude of our capitalists, who would any day buy *foreign* than *Indian*, with their professed *Swaraj* mentality!

During one of his visits to England, Naidu had advised British producers of diesel motors to effect certain changes in their manufacturing

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methods. His advice was found very useful and his suggestions were forthwith accepted. Not only in England, even in Germany, the home of great technical skill, Naidu's matchless brain was taken on trust in these matters. But we in India have not found enough use for such a man! When he actually made arrangements with German Industrialists to open a diesel motor factory in India before the war, the war itself came in his way as an obstacle and the plan had to be abandoned. These are but few instances where Naidu had to put down his hands in disgust and ask the question for himself: "Why should I bother when the odds are so heavy against me?" In a country like Germany or the United States, the value of such a man would be taken as treasure to the nation, but in India, long used to be ruled by a foreign power, the slave mentality of the people have gone too far to the extent that seldom do we honour or make use of our men adequately during their life time in the best interest of the nation. It is a matter of thousand pities but it is a fact.

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Have a look at the careers of those Indians who are today internationally famous in various spheres! Poet Tagore had to get his recognition for his *Gitanjali* from British literary brains like Yeats and Symonds. The result was a *Nobel Prize* for him. Sir C. V. Raman's scientific eminence had to be first applauded by foreigners! Radhakrishnan's greatness as a Thinker and Philosopher had to be first recognised by Oxford. Only after some of these men obtained that stamp of greatness from a foreign country did we even take a good look at them with an eye of admiration! It is not that we do not honour our heroes. We do, but we accord recognition belatedly and once we accord it, we worship mortal Indians as Gods! Just two extremes – either we ignore them or do it beyond all tolerable proportions!

Yet, there are many more Indians whose worth in their particular fields of activity have been well-recognized by England and America, but they never care to even live in India, out of sheer disgust at the way of life here. I know

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the case of a Bengalee who is a great brain in ship-construction matters. He was *first* in every one of the colleges on naval engineering in England he attended, also in Germany. He was offered great positions of trust in both those countries but his love for India made him decline and come here. He wandered from town to town putting forth proposals in the sphere of ship-construction, with that noble idea of making this country great in that line. None listened to him. Only a British firm in Calcutta appreciated his worth and employed him but then, he did not remain with them for long on a question of *colour differences* shown against him in treatment as with the British Officers. He has now got back to England, swearing that never more he would even step on the soil of India in his life time ! Take the case of the greatest exponent of Indian art and culture in Dr. Ananda Coomarasawmy, the Ceylonese. He never wanted to leave India, if he was placed on a position that he deserved. We ignored him and instead, honoured Britishers ! So he went to Boston. I could

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tell this as a result of a personal talk I had with Dr. Coomarasawmy. When he died, we made a great fuss about him. When he lived, we ignored him. All these make me wonder whether we are developing on right lines in our nationalism. Looking at all these too, I am not surprised in the least the way we are treating Naidu, the Industrial Scientist, who could be made to work in the best interests of the country. It is because the academically trained scientist of today who in most cases, wastes his time in researches, spending a mountain of time and then at times by sheer luck, producing a mole of substance in some line or other, cannot stand the sight of *practical men* in the field. Atleast this is one reason which I could think of, and a sanguine Government has the ear for the advice of only the *academic-scientist*. Administrators have always not the true vision to see through practicality, wedded as they are to *red-tapism*, routine work and rustic files.

When the Government saw Naidu giving away few lakhs of rupees for charities and for

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the foundation of technical institutions, the Income-tax Officers in Coimbatore began to wonder as to what actually his fortune should be, in reality. If a man could give away a few lakhs, he should have crores of rupees with him, they thought. Sir Arthur Hope, the Governor had called Naidu, the *Nuffield of India*. Therefore, like Nuffield, Naidu should also have crores, the Income-tax Officers decided. With this assumption the Government tax-collectors began to impose taxes on him. The taxation on him was not based on the records that he produced. It was even alleged that the conduct of the officers in Coimbatore was not all too proper and just. Naidu, the scientist, had now a new *menace* to fight. Officers of the Income-tax department were close upon his heels tormenting him, little knowing that he was not the man to be cowed down by them! It was stated that he was asked to pay an enormous amount of income-tax, incompatible with the standards of his actual income and other just laws relating to the payment of taxes the government

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maintained. Naidu, the scientist is also a rebel of no mean order and you know they even call him a "Fascist", as Mr. V. V. Giri, the famous labour leader once dubbed him! Naidu was too quick in fortifying himself even from this new *menace* which the Income-tax officers created for him. The officers stated that he had earned great wealth during the war and they based those figures on assumptions rather than on facts. Naidu protested. He lost no time in collecting comparative figures from other Transport Companies and prepared a printed statement, showing clearly the injustice meted out to him. While other companies were charged lower rates and lesser amount of taxes in proportion, Naidu stood overcharged. The authorities have now proceeded against him through the courts of law and he is having a fight of his own with the Government on this score.

It does not appear to be all too rosy an affair that a man who earns hard by the sweat of his brow should part with his entire income

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more or less, to the State on taxes unless there was an emergency like war. As far as Naidu was concerned, he would rather give up his wealth to the poor and to such items of philanthropy as would enhance the happiness of the community in which he lived. When the Income-tax authorities took legal steps against him, he wanted the services of the famous lawyer the late Sir Chimanlal Setalvad to defend his case, but on very careful consideration, Sir Setalvad was reported to have told Naidu: "Why should I accept an enormous fee from you and work on this case, only to give in the end fifteen annas in the rupee to the Government in taxes?" Naidu's second choice for a lawyer came to be pitched upon Mr. Kanga, the other famous Bombay legal luminary but he too was not able to accept the brief for a different reason. Then an approach was made to Dr. Ambedkar, before he accepted Membership in the India Cabinet. He was willing to take up the case, if it became absolutely necessary.

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In the meantime, Naidu acted in a different manner as far as settling his tax affairs were concerned. The Government which would not trust his words but the words of petty officers of the Income-tax Department, now appeared amazing in his eyes. Now also, he had no other alternative than to fight this injustice by all the emphasis that he could command. He took a few lakhs of rupees worth government bonds in his hands and gave over to students to distribute them to the people on the road — a thousand rupees to each as a gift! A few lakhs worth of bonds were thus distributed. “I would give away my money to people, not to a Government which is unreasonable”, Naidu appears to have remarked to his close friends. He also gave away an amount to his employees who served him for long in his concern. Further more, he gave up all his proprietary interests in the automobile concerns he commanded for several years, to his workers. Naidu, the genius is also a humourist no less. He even had on the *directorate* of the joint stock company now controlling the business *two*

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of his pet dogs! Perhaps it is given to a Coimbatore joint stock company to make even *dog* as a company director? The mockery of it! But the man Naidu is such that if justice is denied, he would go to frantic limits in all his actions!

Then he took a portion of his cash and straight away bought worthless iron materials of all kinds and stored them up in the compound of his house to rust and decay! In fact, he would waste every pie of what he owned, rather than allow the Government tax collectors whom he did not trust as acting on any just basis. That is the way he fights the Government on a question of justice. George Bernard Shaw, when once questioned whether he was living up to the maxims of clean conduct that he preached through his *plays*, calmly replied that the policemen would not allow him to live a clean life! Now, in this sub-continent of India, unjust tax collectors appear to be making Naidu to deviate from a path of justice to the way of a *rebel* against the State! Few of us could

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adequately understand the stand he had thus taken, but let us quote Gothe in this context. "When people rebel, people are always right". To Naidu, life or death, his heart burns passionately for seeing justice all round in a world which is plunged in injustice all through history and in all walks of life.

Since India became independent, a Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of a great former Federal judge Sir S. Varadachari, to inquire into cases of income-tax evasion. It was established when Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chetty was Finance Minister. Chetty, a great friend of Naidu once inquired of the latter at what stage was his income-tax affairs? To this, Naidu replied that as a member of the India Cabinet, he should not interfere in this matter. In other words, Naidu did not want his friendship with the Finance Minister to be brought into any official connection at all.

The Income-tax Evasion Inquiry Commission was given about 1400 cases by the

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Finance Ministry to inquire, report and settle where settlement was found possible. *But none of these cases attracted more public attention in the whole country than Naidu's.* His fight against the Income-tax Department of the Government of India, in the name of justice, became *news* in India's papers and magazines. In cities like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, Naidu's income-tax troubles drew the widest sympathies from the public and the Press. Politicians began to talk about it; even some Government officials secretly expressed protest discussing this affair. And, it is no exaggeration to say that in the whole country, talk went on that Naidu was being unjustly harassed by vengeful Income-tax officials in New Delhi. The strange ways of these officials are clear from one instance I shall narrate here. Singh, a Delhi military contractor made a fortune during the last world war. He was assessed for twenty four lakhs of rupees as evaded tax. The man somehow paid it. When he did, he was questioned as to from which source he got this

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amount he paid? Persecution was certain in his eyes! Singh who was in his fifties died soon after from shock, dreading the claws of the income-tax collecting creature as sure to maul him. With such instances in the knowledge of newspaper-men, it was no wonder the papers had begun to sympathize with Naidu.

The *Blitz*, that fearless news Magazine of Bombay, writing about the vindictive way in which alleged tax-evaders' cases were being dealt with by the Income-tax Officials, published an article in its issue dated April 26, 1950, under the heading *vindictiveness*. Dealing with Naidu's affair, the paper in an introductory note summed up as follows :

"No less than 40 attachments of Bank accounts, personal assets and properties, and involving an Industrialist (not a speculator or a blackmarketeer) into multiplicity of legal proceedings..... this is the tragic plight of Mr. G. D. Naidu, hailed by former Madras Governor Sir Arthur Hope as the *Nuffield of India*, for his multifarious charities. Vindictiveness shown in his case by the

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Central Board of Revenue can be seen from the following, which is a summary of the documentation of harassments:

“Attachment of valuable materials collected and stored and inventions, without giving him time for his appeal; not accepting voluntary offer of handing over the keys of his properties to avoid unnecessary and shameful attachment and publicity; refusal to accept voluntary offer of payment of the assessed amount in instalments under protest pending finalisation of his appeal; not accepting the offer and attaching 2½ lakhs worth of property for a mere fraction of the amount!

“In August 1946, before the first attachment, the Imperial Bank of India offered to guarantee a payment of 2 lakhs but the department refused to accept this guarantee and attached property worth nearly 3 lakhs and realized less than Rs. 20,000. In this and many other ways, the Income-tax Department has misused the powers that were vested in them.”

The *Blitz* writer then graphically dealt with a case in the Madras High Court in which

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Naidu was prosecuted by the Tax authorities, on a charge of misfeasance. He wrote :

" I recently came across yet another case that was reported in the *Indian Republic* daily newspaper of Madras, a case in which a settlement decided by a fairminded British Judge of the Madras High Court was turned down by the Central Board of Revenue. I quote the report as it is, from that daily paper in its City edition dated January 20.

"The examination of Mr. G. D. Naidu, the well-known industrialist of South India, which was being conducted at the Madras High Court by His Lordship Mr. Justice E. E. Mack, reached stage..... when certain proposals for an amicable settlement between Mr. Naidu and the Government of India came up for consideration and case was adjourned to January, 31.

"Mr. G. D. Naidu, the Managing Director of a number of motor transport and other companies in Coimbatore, it was alleged, failed to pay the incometax, excess profits tax, etc., amounting to about Rs. 23 lakhs, for two years.

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"On a motion by the Income-tax Department the concerns were ordered to be liquidated. When the official Assignee went to take charge he is stated to have found several irregularities.

"A public enquiry into the conduct of Mr. Naidu and the other directors of the concerns was, therefore, ordered by the High Court.

"When the examination of Mr. Naidu, which was commenced on January, 16, was resumed.....His Lordship made a suggestion in the light of a compromise offer made previously by the Government of India to Mr. Naidu, which the latter rejected then, was now agreeable to that offer.

"His Lordship, thereupon, observed in an order: 'I made a proposal after considering all aspects of this unfortunate matter that an honourable compromise might be reached by fixing the total income-tax due from Mr. G. D. Naidu in respect of the transport companies etc., at Rs. 10 lakhs, out of which the income-tax paid voluntarily and that recovered for previous assessments by attaching properties or otherwise should be deducted.

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"On behalf of the Income-tax Department an adjournment was asked for to submit the compromise to the Government of India for consideration and ratification.

"Granting the adjournment His Lordship observed: 'I am definitely of opinion that a compromise of this matter as between Mr. G. D. Naidu and the Government of India should finally determine all tax due by him and the companies in which he has been concerned up to March 31, last year, so that there might be no loose threads untied and Mr. G. D. Naidu can start his relation with Government with a clean slate and with an entirely different orientation developing his industry with the fullest co-operation of the Government and Government authorities

"His Lordship added that: 'If this compromise is accepted by both parties, I shall have no hesitation in granting sanction to it and permitting all proceedings for misfeasance against Mr. G. D. Naidu to be dropped.

"When the Madras Judge specified the compromise terms, Mr. Naidu was at

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first hesitant to accept, but it did not take him long to realize that he should respect the words of a well-meaning and upright judge who wanted to end this case, in order that peace and better relations between Naidu and the Government might be restored. But the prosaic Central Board of Revenue unceremoniously turned down the compromise terms of Justice Mack. So, the proceedings in the case are prolonged and the vivisection of Naidu goes on merrily as before."

Secondly, the *Orient*, a Calcutta picture magazine, in its issue dated January 8, 1950, came out with a scathing article entitled *Dreyfus or Dodger of Taxes?*, written by a Bengali writer H. N. Muzamdar, dealing with the Naidu-case. He summed up his long article thus :

"Now, we hear of Government being anxious to deal with alleged tax-evaders in a sympathetic and *humane* way. Why not begin translating such an attitude by making a thorough independent inquiry into this particular, complex Coimbatore Case? Thousands in India are concerned and watchful about what is happening

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to Naidu, because, to all South India he is a dear soul. As Sir C. V. Raman is their greatest scientist, Sir C. P. Ramasamy Aiyer, their greatest administrator, even so, G. D. Naidu is their greatest Industrial Scientist and Inventor-genius. In silence, Naidu's friends now watch his predicament, but if he is thoroughly ruined in the end, what will happen in the South, it is not for me to hastily say here. One merely wishes at this juncture that because of any denial of justice to him, this should not turn out to be an Indian *Dreyfus* case!"

Thirdly, Mr. K. Subba Rau, the well-known Madras Editor writing in his inimitable way an appreciative article in *Swatantra*, the *weekly* he edits, had a few striking comments to make. He wrote:

"A dispute over income-tax has hurt Sri G. D. Naidu to the quick. He has come to the stern decision never more to earn any income that can be taxed.

.....*There is, I believe, not another man in the country like G. D. Naidu.* He is a born genius of the pattern of

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Edison. The merit of the American inventor was recognised by a wise Government and rich industrialists who vie with each other in placing enormous resources at his disposal to aid him in his experiments. But Naidu has had to create his own resources. Government here has not had the wisdom to recognise the social and national worth of his inventive genius."

A friend of Naidu in 1950 issued a strange *New Year Greeting Card*, picturizing his Income-tax affair. A thousand cards were sent all over the country. An interesting comment about it appeared in that most popular Madras weekly, the *Free India*. Thus, Naidu's Income-tax affair received a blaze of publicity all over the country, as nothing else relating to the private affair of any individual did! There is only one reason for all that. The man is so popular with the people.

XI

EXPERIMENTS WITH PLANTS

Naidu's talents are not confined to machineries alone. His sharp brain works all-round. We hear of the slogan *Grow more food* everywhere and yet the demonstrations Naidu has carried out in this sphere is remarkable. He was some kind of a member in a committee connected with the Agricultural College in Coimbatore. When he gave counsel regarding better production of corn in the country, some academic scientists were wondering what an automobile man knew about scientific corn production or farming! Then he gave practical demonstration as to what he could do. Let me quote his own words as taken from a speech of his in Coimbatore. Citing the example of the plants grown in his own garden, he said:

“In this compound, behind this wall you can see a cotton plant more than ten feet in height and it has yielded twenty four pounds of cotton with $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches staple within a year. The seeds of this plant were sown again and the plants have

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grown more than five feet within four months. A millet plant has grown in this compound up to $18\frac{1}{2}$ feet with more than twenty-six branches of 6 to 12 feet, and other branches of two or three feet, altogether 39 cobs, the total length of the stems being 181 feet. Again, the seeds of this plant were sown and the plants have grown more than ten feet within eight weeks."

Besides, he took an interest in fruit culture. He brought forth on a single papaya tree fruits, some resembling tomatoes in shape and others looking like cucumbers, melons and pumpkins! He could also change the taste of an orange from sweetness to bitterness and from sourness to sweetness through some chemical process. I understand he drives in certain chemicals into the stems and fruits of the plants, through a syringe-needle as if a surgeon injects a patient. Similarly, he uses a method to sweeten bunches of plantains by injecting certain vital chemical matter into them. This in itself may not be a very useful thing, but I am only just citing this to show

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what wonders could be worked by this scientist in any sphere where he took an interest, and his interests are indeed varied.

At Podanur, a place seven miles from Coimbatore, Naidu had set apart forty acres of land to carry on his agricultural and horticultural experiments. That garden has been now visited by hundreds of eminent people from many parts of the world to see the botanic marvels he had created there. Sir C. V. Raman, India's great scientist was thrilled to see this place. "Like Luther Burbank, the great American Naturalist", Raman said, "Naidu sought to improve upon nature's creations in the plant world." He added: "His methods are original. I hope the world at large will benefit by his experiments". Sir John Russel, the agricultural scientist who visited the Naidu-farm early in 1951 was equally astonished to see all that he saw there! He said, he was struck by the great wisdom that had been shown by Naidu in his plant experiments. "Of course, one always likes to meet some one who has

Experiments with Plants

already done something in this world and has not merely fought his way through life", he went on to say. Naidu, Sir John felt, had created some remarkable plants treated with his potent injections besides his engineering achievements. "If only India had a few more men like Naidu in its agriculture, the food problem would soon be solved", the British scientist unreservedly remarked. No less was the meed of praise that came out of the lips of Prof. A. W. Ashby, Director of the Agricultural Economics Institute, Oxford. He came to India in 1950, visited the Podanur farm of Naidu and recorded his impressions as follows :

"The visit to the garden to see cotton, papaya, plantains etc, would have envy, if envy were possible. But I hope 'G. D.' will very soon be able to give his secrets to the agricultural world and that this world will accept them freely and gladly"

Yet, another was a Chinese visitor Dr. Ksioh-yo Hon, the Ecologist of the

Institute of Systematic Botany in Peking. He said that Naidu was one of the greatest men he had ever seen in the world and in the field of agriculture, the Chinese educationist would, any day, prefer to dedicate himself a student under the famous Indian.

Tributes of the kind narrated here are innumerable. Their continuous recording would amount only to taking more space here. Every one who came across the useful and astonishing work of this industrialist in the field of agriculture stood puzzled at what he had done. Yes, Naidu, the people's man has abundant peoples' appreciation. With that, he is to perhaps remain content!

XII

SEVEN MONTHS IN EUROPE

In the summer of 1950, Naidu appeared a picture of plentiful worries. The usual income-tax troubles were there. A suit instituted against him by the tax-authorities in the Madras High Court for misfeasance was being continued. Financial worries arising from the ruin he faced on account of his transport business going to hell on account of governmental actions against him, led him to tormenting thoughts. With all that, the man kept a cool head, and perhaps to make it cooler still, he now decided on a European trip. There was yet another reason. Naidu was anxious to see for himself all the post-war developments in the field of machinery inventions and developments. Once he decided on the trip, many came to him for suggestions regarding possible new industries to be started in India, after he had seen new industrial developments in Europe. Ever willing to help friends, he told them that he would look around Europe and suggest wise steps in the matter.

On May 10, Naidu flew away to Paris from Bombay. He was accompanied by his friend Dr. C. S. Ramaswamy Aiyer, his constant companion even in his previous tours abroad. It was not that Naidu needed a medical man to be his side always, but Aiyer and he were such good companions throughout. A Madras legislator who was going to attend an international agricultural conference was also with them.

On arriving in England the first thing Naidu did was to look up the British Industries Fair, then held in London and Birmingham. Summing up his impressions of the Fair, Naidu wrote :

“ During the whole period of the Exhibition, we did not fail to see a single booth.....We saw everything from a pin to a gigantic machine and from nothing to the costliest materials produced by the men who gained a vast and endless experience during the war. We cannot compare the fertile knowledge of these people who achieved such a tremendous benefit in the war with that of our

Seven Months in Europe

people who achieved nothing in comparison with this. I am ashamed to say that we have achieved nothing in our country !

While he was visiting the British Industries Fair in London, the British Information Ministry, knowing of his presence there, sent out a special writer to cover a story about him. He appeared a man of such importance in the Ministry's eyes. They reckoned him as one of the famous Indians of our times. That way, they decided a write-up about him to be released to the Indian Press through their British Information services. It was, then, widely published in all Indian newspapers, in English and the various languages. The piece was written by Sylvia Matheson, who elaborately chronicled the *doings* of Naidu from boyhood to the present day. She began her narrative thus :

" I had breakfast the other morning with one of the most unusual Indians I have ever met - the fifty seven year old Mr. G. D. Naidu of Coimbatore, whose

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generosity, love for founding educational institutions and amazing energy led one Governor of Madras to call him the *Nuffield of India.*"

From London he repaired to Stockholm to attend an international conference of agricultural producers, in session there in the month of May itself. He liked that city, which had fortunately escaped the ravages of war. He said that "generally Switzerland and Sweden are the two cleanest countries in Europe. The people in these countries are pleasant and helpful". The hospitality of the Swedish people impressed him very much. He was charmed by a Mr. Frankel, met in Stockholm by sheer chance. Of his magnanimity, Naidu recorded:

"We do not know how many miles we travelled in his car, nor how much petrol was consumed. We also do not know how much money he spent on us for fares, teas and dinners. Is it not a wonder why one should give so much help to us who were unknown to him? That is the nature of the people whom we must appreciate, learn and follow".

Seven Months in Europe

The next city visited by Naidu was Copenhagen, capital of Denmark. Then, he went to Hamburg in Germany to see his old friends the Kuhns, who were in a way responsible to fire the imagination of Naidu to visit Europe in 1932, they extending him a personal invitation at Coimbatore. Later on, he went over to Stuttgart to meet yet another friend Mr. Schmidtman. In all these places he visited, his chief interest was to look around the factories, machines and study the post-war developments in Industry. He found an amazing recovery of conditions in Germany. "I do not know the actual amount of help given by America and England by the Marshall and Schuman plans, but the present-day Germany has developed rapidly and is equal to many of the more progressive countries", he recorded in his *travel-diary*.

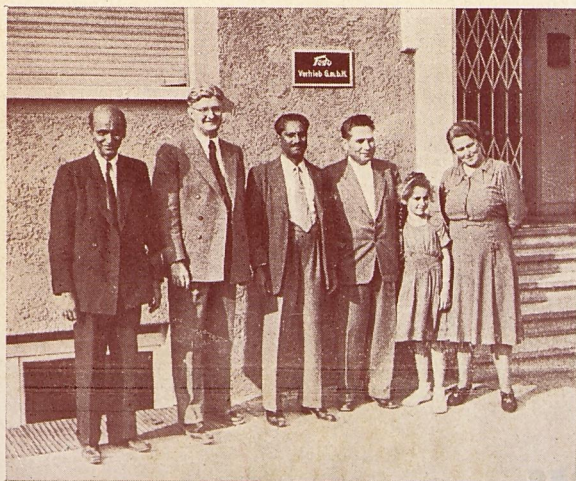
While in Germany, Naidu had an unusual experience. He was once auto-driven by none else than Smidt, who was once a trusted chauffeur of Herr Hitler. It happened this

way. Naidu was to inspect a cycle-chain producing factory at Pocking at the invitation of its engineer Herr Ernst Heym. He himself had driven Naidu from Munich to Pocking, but he could not take him back. Smidt was then asked to drive Naidu and his friend to Munich and as the famous chauffeur was at the wheel, a copious conversation between them went on. Smidt said that he was one of the four principal and confidential chauffeurs of Hitler, living in the Chancellory itself in Berlin. He believed Hitler was no longer alive, since no news about him emerged since 1945 to the contrary! Hitler was a puritan, Smidt affirmed, in as much as he did not touch alcohol, meat or engage himself in the pastime of frolics with women! It might be that no man was a *hero* to his valet, but Hitler was certainly a very great man in the eyes of Smidt. For six hours he drove the *auto*, reaching Munich by two of the clock in the morning. A visit was then paid to the famous *Beer Cellar* of Hitler at Munich, a place from which the Fuhrer in his day thundered a lot, telling the world all about German reactions to international questions.



AT A LONDON LUNCH PARTY

*Mr. Kulkarni, Mr. Naidu, Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, Mr. Dutt,
Dr. C. S. Ramaswami, Sir Charles Cunningham.*



IN GERMANY

*Mr. Naidu, Mr. R. Schmidtman, Mr. R. V. Swaminathan,
Mr. G. Stoll, Miss Stoll, Mrs. Stoll.*

Seven Months in Europe

While Naidu was in Stuttgart, he was cornered by Willy Steuerwald, the star-reporter of the newspaper *Stuttgarter Zeitung* for an interview. In the double-column spread story he wrote about Naidu in the paper's issue of August 24, the German scribe had some interesting remarks to make. A photograph of the famous Indian standing besides a plant in his Podanur Agricultural Farm was also reproduced along with the article. Willy gave his first impressions of Naidu as follows:

“That was the most unique man I ever met in the 25 years of my reporter job. Only his eyes - this must have been, what everyone got attracted, when coming in touch with the man. Like black agates, they are shining Whatever this man is looking at, always his look is fully on the target. Never does he look out of the corners of his eyes, never they wander nervously around! An amazing man!”

In Germany his days were devoted to varied interests. He visited the agriculture minister at Stuttgart and held a discussion one

day, worked in a few factories to gain practical experience from post-war machineries and studied the way Germany recovered from the last catastrophic war.

When he went to lunch one day at a vegetarian hotel in Stuttgart, he preferred to prepare a South Indian dish of his own choice at the kitchen! He took a quantity of roughly-ground wheat powder and fried it, sprinkling a few pieces of hot chilly and a little salt. In Naidu's language Tamil, this preparation is known as *Uppuma*. He ate a portion of it and asked the hotel-keeper to serve the same to the other guests then present there. Many of them who ate it, immensely liked it, that some of them demanded of Naidu the actual *recipe* for this unusual preparation! He repeated the performance later on at a London restaurant, where the customers appreciated the dishes he prepared, with the result that Naidu began thinking aloud whether it was not a profitable thing after all, to open an eating-house in the Metropolis!



IN A STUTTGART HOTEL - KITCHEN

— Mr. Naidu (*Extreme Right*)

Seven Months in Europe

Naidu was also in Switzerland for some weeks. He had gone there to learn the art of watch-making, for which that country held a sort of world monopoly in trade. At Lausanne, he worked in a watch-factory with the help of its Director Mr. Kinyard. Later, he visited the well-known Omega Watch Factory at Bien, where there was also a training school for budding watch-makers of the land. It appears that usually visitors were not allowed in the Omega factory for the one reason that precision and production somewhat suffered through the interruption of visitors going round. He also visited Zurich, Geneva, and Basle. In the last mentioned town Dr. Ramasami Aiyer looked around the famous Swiss Chemical enterprise - *the Ciba and Roche Laboratories and Pharmaceutical works.*

Seven months of useful tour and study, Naidu completed now. On December 2, he returned to Coimbatore looking fresh and vigorous in health, in spite of the busy times spent abroad. The people of Coimbatore

heralded his return with feelings of joy. A whisper went round everywhere from man to man: "Don't you know? G. D. has returned!" It was perhaps something like Zindbad, getting home from his latest travel of adventure! Soon after he arrived, the people of Coimbatore gave him a public reception, the function presided over by his old friend Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chetty. Naidu was warmly congratulated by many speakers on that occasion for his fresh chapter of enterprise in Europe.

XIII

POSTSCRIPT

I have so far held up the mirror to let you see the *hero* of this book - Naidu, the Inventor-Scientist, who now passes on his years toiling, sorrowing, smiling, humouring, all with the loftiest of motives in him. I have explained a few phases of the man, though not fully, and to write about him extensively, I feel it is not at all an easy task for a hand like mine and as I click my *type writer* writing these lines, I often take a look at his picture on my study table. The two penetrating, sharp, intelligent eyes of Naidu stare at me all the time! I feel as if he is continuously asking me the question: "Why have you to do this?" I have no answer to give him at all, but I have an answer for others. It was stated that the great Vaishnavite Saint Ramanuja, once he knew the *path of bliss*, was impatient to tell everyone on earth what that *path* was, and he told all that then, to those around him. While making no claim to any pretensions or sublimity of the task on the

same scale, I have a sort of impatience that the understanding I have for a genius countryman of mine like Naidu should be shared by others as well and with that understanding, if we could make use of his talents towards the attainment of greater benefactions to our nation as a whole, well, that is the one purpose that prompted me to get at this job with a continuous passion.

It is not only the picture that stares at me from my study-table that makes my thoughts wander far way from Calcutta. I think of the times I happened to be sitting with Naidu occasionally for a day or two, years ago. I think of his figure engaged in profuse conversation with dozens of visitors at *Gopal Bagh*. I think of his figure while delivering his lectures. I think of the way he taught technical subjects to the Engineering schools he conducted in Coimbatore. I recollect the way he would wisecrack and make us all laugh with a pungent joke. I think of the *Scientist* sitting in a serious mood all alone contemplating

Postscript

over scores of problems in mind, while his slender fingers held up cigarettes after cigarettes and the thin lips sent out clouds of smoke in the room. I could see right before me even today the way he sat down in his office room at the United Motors building calling his lady stenographers one by one through the *walkie-talkie* and giving them dictation of letters, his interviewing employees, receiving a friend and carrying on a congenial conversation and then, in a moment's time changing his mood to hotly chide an employee of his who might have been at fault! I think of the times I went round with him to see his vast libraries where there are tons of papers, old journals on technical and other subjects. I remember my examining a few books among the thousands of volumes he stocked, I see him sitting at the factory hall of the National Electric Works with greasy fingers, handling mechanical tools and I also see him at the meal-table surrounded by guests talking on the efficacy of vegetarianism and the propensities in each dish

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served. Well, such is Naidu, the full man with a full life and a full purpose in life.

Am I alone in having such favourable impressions of Naidu? I know there are thousands who share them with me. He has as many friends, as he has enemies but then, all of them cherish a high regard for him. Of the many opinions expressed on Naidu, the tributes paid to him quite recently by the greatest Scientist Asia has produced - I refer to our Sir C. V. Raman - vastly interested me. He happened to be at Coimbatore now and then and at a party given him by Naidu, he had a few weighty remarks to make. Sir Chandrasekhara said:

“A great educator, an enterpreneur in many fields of engineering and industry, a warm hearted man filled with love for his fellows and a desire to help them in their troubles, Mr. Naidu is truly a man in a million - perhaps this is an understatement!”

A famous American Businessman in Frank S. Brainard, who was once Naidu's

It would need an abler pen than mine to sketch in a few words a picture of the remarkable man that H^r G. D. Naidu is and to indicate his great character and most varied achievements. Only this morning I visited a farm near Podunur where he has created a whole series of botanic marvels which should give food for thought to any enterprising biologist. A great educator, an entrepreneur in many fields of engineering and industry, a warm-hearted man filled with love for his fellows and a desire to help them in their troubles, H^r Naidu is truly a man in a million. — perhaps this is an understatement!

C. V. Raman
9. April 1950

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guest in Coimbatore said that his greatest desire was to pray that this Indian's great knowledge and ability would not be wasted, but should be used in building the industrial strength of India, which would in turn create wealth, in order to raise the standard of living of the people. Mr. G. G. Morarji, Chairman of the Bombay Electric Supply and Transports Organization after a visit to Naidu, felt why the Industrial Scientist's immeasurable abilities were not being availed of by the Government of India, since he is such an *asset* to the Indian nation! Personally, Morarji said, he had decided to study the "Philosophy, psychology and methods of working" Naidu had before him in life. Naidu's genius for organization, so rare in our country, impressed Acharya Kripalani, a former Congress President, on meeting him. Dr. Arne Muntzing, a Swedish Professor of Genetics, in the University of Lund, Sweden, was yet another of the guests of Naidu in the early part of this year. He said that Naidu had been of great interest to him, as judged by his important and unusually

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successful work in the field of engineering, but also by his interesting biological work which deserved careful attention. Dr. B. N. Dey, for long Chief Engineer of the Calcutta Corporation and an important figure in the world of Indian Engineering, was astonished to find Naidu not only a genius but more than that! "He was an institution! His organizations, exhibitions, agricultural farms are unique. I have not seen anything like them anywhere and I have seen a good bit of the world. To come to Mr. Naidu, is to come on a pilgrimage", Dey recorded. And he felt himself a pilgrim under the care of the *High Priest of Science, Industry and Engineering* that G. D. was! To understand Naidu, the famous Bengali confessed, one had to see the colossal creations of this scientific Colossus!

See, what the greatest administrative genius of modern India, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer had written somewhere:

"Naidu thinks and acts on original and unconventional lines and has been able to achieve notable results. It is a

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thousand pities that his dynamic enthusiasm and his faculty of leadership have not been more fully appreciated and utilized at this juncture in our country's history and political controversies and personal equations must yield place to carefully planned programmes carried out with vigour and continuity".

Naidu is the "genius and wizard, ever memorable, never to be forgotten", observed the late Dr. (Sir) C. R. Reddy, the great educationist of South India. "India and the world could well profit by more men like G. D. Naidu", tributed J. Owen, the famous British Trade Union leader, once he met Naidu in Coimbatore.

Still, a few remarks that emanated from the lips of Sir R. K. Shanmukham Chettiar, India's Finance Minister, is also of interest to us. Said he :

"Mr. Naidu invites a Minister to a tea party and advises him how to conduct a Government. He invites a Vice-Chancellor and instructs him how to run educational institutions.. He invites an industrialist to a party and teaches him

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the methods of industrialization of the country. Mr. Naidu's thought-provoking utterances have always retained the spirit of his utmost sincerity, his tenacity of purpose and immense educative value to the public".

Not a word of exaggeration, I think, for Naidu could talk with ease on any subject with his thoroughness of self-acquired knowledge and feelings of extreme conviction.

It is not only that we have somehow found such a man in India, but having found him, have not made him yield to the nation the best that is in him. The times are changing and a new outlook also should be coming to a *free India*. When it does, we shall not let opportunities slip away. We ought to, then atleast, get determined to pull together all the available resources and brains of the people in this country for the betterment of the nation. When we attempt such a task, we should of course be availing ourselves of the services of men like Naidu in the realms of Science and Industry.

THE END

PRESS OPINIONS

(FIRST EDITION)

“Well-written book. Mr. Perumal tells his story in a simple style, with an array of interesting facts and spicy anecdotes”.

— *THE HINDU*, Madras.

“Mr. Perumal is at his best in Character sketching where his simple and unadorned style and the systematic array of a mass of interesting facts find full-play. And in this book, the author has packed scores of anecdotes and incidents that make the book as fascinating as any success story from the West”.

— *FREE INDIA*, Madras.

“Mr. Perumal has done very good service in writing this biography, for, very many interesting details are revealed ... He narrates in a delightful way the life of Mr. G. D. Naidu”.

— *COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY*, New Delhi.

“Mr. Perumal presents us with the story of an interesting figure”.

— *THE DAWN*, Karachi.

“Mr. Perumal places the subject in the correct perspective, neither too far nor too near, neither too large nor too small a view. For this correct measure, he has sifted the most significant facts out of a large collection and preserved their appropriate romance, thrill, colour and fullness. The book is a fine example of portrayal of character”.

— *GUARDIAN*, Madras.

"In this book are unfolded the little-known details of the brilliant career of Mr. G. D. Naidu, the South Indian Industrialist".

— *THE FORUM*, Bombay.

"The book is well-written and we congratulate Mr. Perumal on his true and correct presentation of one of the greatest philanthropists of South India. ... Has he exaggerated facts relating to Mr. Naidu as is generally the case with most Boswells? The answer is a definite 'No'."

— *THE SUNDAY OBSERVER*, Madras.

"Here we are offered an account of the self-made man and philanthropist, Mr. G. D. Naidu, whom Sir Arthur Hope, the Governor of Madras, called, *Lord Nuffield of India*. The volume written in a breezy style deserves careful study by the aspiring and the ambitious".

— *AMRITA BAZAAR PATRIKA*, Calcutta.

"An inventor and Philanthropist of note is Mr. G. D. Naidu of South India, whose philanthropical activities Sir Arthur Hope, Governor of Madras, compared to those of Lord Nuffield".

— *ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA*, Bombay.

