

Of the few people I can call as friends, from past and present, one name I have to definitely refer to as a friend without an option, is Dr. Raja Ramanna, because it was him, when he was alive, who constantly reminded me that he was a friend of mine. I don't know how privileged one should feel to refer to late Dr. Raja Ramanna, the eminent nuclear physicist and say that he was a friend.

Going to bring him in my car to my show, to interview him, I saw him for the first time when he got into the car with a walking stick in a hand, during the time he was recovering from a fall which had resulted in a few broken bones.

I had only heard about him before and was in awe of him and I suppose that is the power of the atom bomb. The half hour I spent interviewing him helped me get introduced to a man who was so humble and child like, that every answer of his put more questions in my mind and every question of mine, he answered so patiently with a constant smile on his face. From then, for about a year, I was a regular visitor to his house, on invitation, to spend the evening over a few glasses of whiskey, with him constantly reminding me that he was not allowed to drink.

After a few such evenings and a dozen conversations over the phone, one evening when I went to visit him, after carefully dodging his pet dog, I reached him in his drawing room. I stretched my hand out to shake hands with the great man. He did not offer his hand and said 'friends are supposed to hug and not shake hands' and gave me a warm welcome with a hug. Whatever the hug meant, maybe, but for those few seconds that time and every time after that, in that hug of his, I felt like a minute being in the arms of a giant.

Rationalist and a practical person, he was, Dr. Ramanna was a great human being who did not belong to any tradition and did not subscribe to any belief systems, though he could speak for hours on Indian classical music, Hindu culture, society, religion and tradition, apart from about his field of expertise and science. Unlike everything else, science was so natural to him and it was part of him.

Once he played the piano for me and watching him at the instrument I could not see an eighty year old person but a young teenager beaming with energy and completely in love with his object of desire. Though I could not understand the notes nor the piece he played, I was overwhelmed by the all pervading esoteric sounds, and for that moment I had this great urge surging inside me to learn the art of appreciating good music only to fill the empty spaces within me.

Talking to Dr. Ramanna, was an encounter with life, every time. No wonder that the great Dr. Raman, called Dr. Raja Ramanna, 'a natural philosopher.'

I don't know what kept me so busy that in spite of his many invitations I could not meet him for a long period of two months, and one day I heard that he was no more – that is, before he could keep his promise of telling me how an atom bomb was made.

Still, Dr. Ramanna reminds me, how small I am, and how much I need to grow.