

Dr. Pranakrushna Parija

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To extol Dr. Pranakrushna Parija as a distinguished scientist and a great educationalist should not be at the expense of his stature as a man. Some men are born great and some acquire greatness. Born in a poor family in a village remote from enlightened community and in an environment not very promising, Pranakrushna's struggle for life's opportunities began early. He represents the upheaval task of one who, by the utmost use of natural gifts, disciplined mind, and by perseverance, rose, to eminence in the fields of his choice in science, education and humanitarian service.

Botany is not generally regarded as a fascinating subject by most people and was not a very popular one in the early decades of the present century, when Pranakrushna fixed his preference for it. The subject attracted in him absorbing interest, and as he explored deeply, it became increasingly interesting disclosing the varieties and complexities of plant life against the background of all kinds of life in this material world constituting an entirety in the unimaginable vastness of the universe. He spent about nine years in the Cambridge University (U.K.) and his labours yielded unequal fruitful results. His success in this branch of science, kindled the interest of many a promising student in Orissa to higher studies in this direction. Dr. Pranakrushna Parija has contributed a good deal in organising and

improving facilities in higher studies in the subject in the universities in Orissa.

Dr. Parija always kept an open mind to scientific discoveries in other branches of science and it was amazing to note in him up-to-date information, not only in subjects like Botany, but also in other sciences. He said that his mind should be an open door to all truth, and that a successful teacher should be an assiduous student throughout his life. Thus when he was called upon to take over the responsibilities of the Director of Agriculture for a couple of years, he brought to bear his wide knowledge derived from various sources in ensuring effective administration in the department for the improvement of agricultural products.

In spheres of administrative responsibility when Dr. Parija took over he gave attention to related details. Later in his office as principal of the Ravenshaw College, he was invited to serve in many committees and to give counsel in many institutions in different parts of India. He felt very uneasy that he could not do his duty in looking into all details in his office. I was Secretary to the Government of Orissa from 1939 to 1944 in many subjects including Education. We provided a Bursar to relieve Dr. Parija of supervision in financial and routine matters. During 1943, the Parla-Godavaris Ministry took an important decision of establishing a University in Orissa, the first of its kind known as the Utkal University.

The Ruler states in Orissa had not integrated to the province at the time. The Secretariate was asked to give speedy implementation to the policy accepted with the consents of the Ruling Chiefs. The details of the required legislative measure had to be worked out together with the elaborate regulations and rules within the frame work of the agreement with the Ruling Chief and the requirements of the two rulers of Orissa which had not then merged into one. Dr. Parija who was the Vice-Chancellor elect was helpful in giving his counsel and his personal attention into details. The Utkal University was inaugurated in 1943 by the then Chancellor Sir Huthurn Lewis, Governor of Orissa.

Dr. Pranakrushna Parija with his wide experience as an educationalist and as a result of his intimate association in the Universities of Patna and elsewhere gave a proper direction in the working of the new University. There were as usual teaching troubles at the beginning due to inadequate facilities and insist on demands for speedy expansions. The position of a Vice-Chancellor is not a bed of roses, and Dr. Parija had to face inevitable problems and also thereby criticism. The staff also were not quite efficient nor above questionable dealings. As far as possible he maintained a dignified altitude. He pleaded for provision of more officers to deal with expanding departments, when the University shifted from Cuttack to Vani-Vihar in Bhubaneswar. The Senate also presented a scene of stormy controversies some times and Dr. Parija who presided over the meetings eased off the situation by his ready wit and subtle humour. He always maintained the prestige of the Chair in various meetings. In the Senate, the syndicate and the committees, he was a perfect gentleman, and a gentleman is always a gentleman. He could disagree with others without being disagreeable. As a great statesman (Disrali) has said "propriety of manners and consideration for others are the two main characteristic of a gentleman." These virtues indeed were richly manifest in Dr. Parija.

Politics has been one obsession with the students community in post-independent days and this has vitiated academic atmosphere. The rivalry between political parties and the tendency to exploit the youthful forces for their purpose has been a big contributing factor to the unrest. The farment of unrest has assured serious proportion in every sphere of our national life, among workers, labourers, the peasants, the youth, the students and the public servants. It is a common maxim in the political tendencies that when there are great movements for "demands" and "rights" without corresponding regard for the rights of others, or as a matter of fact, for responsibilities to the nation as a whole, confusion and anarchy sets in throughout such a situation is exploited by the strong-willed persons or groups in bringing in authoritarian Government, like dictatorship. Then the people become a bundle of duties with little personal rights. In democracy, worthy the name, the citizen has a balanced view of his rights as well as responsibilities. Political education of the people has been wanting leading to grave consequences in a nation where illiteracy among women is 90 per cent and general illiteracy is 70 per cent. The latest trend has shown that the majority of people are swayed more by their feelings than by reason. This does not augur well for this vast country as India. Dr. Parija with his analytical mind perceived the political trend. He entered the Orissa Legislative Assembly in 1951 as an independent member. He was sincere and outspoken in expressing his views - never compromising on matters involving ethical standard and moral principle. It is more important what we are within than what we express without. Our other expressions should correspond with what we are within. If it is otherwise, we tend to be insincere, hypocritical and prone to cherish double standards. Such a life breeds corruption and opportunism in public life, and such a character breeds cankerworm not only in body politic but also in national life. Dr. Parija kept away from such double standards with his innate

goodness. He was among a few of the lone stars that shed a passing light.

Dr. Parija's sense of dedication was not confined only to the outer world. He had his duty to the family as well. On return from England in 1920, he was appointed as Professor of Botany in the Ravenshaw College in the cadre of the Indian Educational Service. He married Sundermoni, a lady from the rural surroundings with only elementary education. She never entered the threshold of a High School, as there was only the Ravenshaw Girls' High School at Cuttack. Co-education was an anathema in those days. Dr. Parija gave his wife a modicum of education at home including the art of sewing and knitting imparted by a woman tutor. Thus Mrs. Parija was fitted to take her place not only at home, but also in society. She shared with other ladies of the advanced community in activities for the welfare of women and children. Dr. Parija gave his best to his children so as to enable them to have a befitting place in life. In these days when there is call for removal of illiteracy, mostly in rural communities, Dr. Parija's example will serve as a beacon light.

Dr. Parija had a measure of strong weather in his life. There were sad bereavements by the loss of his eldest daughter and the youngest son who was an I.A.S., on such occasions he was composed when I met him on the day following the day his son passed away, he was composed and in his normal mood. When we parted after half an hour's talk, he went inside and presented me a book. He thought I was interested in. Indeed, it was an interesting book for me, it vividly represented the land where Jesus lived, taught and was crucified - such was the range of studies of Dr. Parija.

He had disciplined himself in life from his student days and thus could face the vicissitudes in life with equanimity and steadiness. Discipline characterised him as a teacher, as a research scholar, and as a citizen. He often bewailed the present indiscipline among students. Politics has

become an obsession with most students. Politics is not the only aspect of our life. Any one who has politics as his primary interest or agitation as a career is not necessarily a student being enrolled as a student just as a pram being placed in a motor garage does not necessarily turn out to be a motor car or an automobile. As the scripture says - "a little leaven leavens the hole lump." The great scientist Albert Einstein when asked by the research student of the Harvard University for a piece of single advice which should guide them in future, readily answered, "Young men, devote an hour each day to examine your pre-conceived notions or what you have learnt and the time thus used would be most rewarding." A well regulated life is the hall mark of a student and in fact of any one who would be of any worth in this life.

Dr. Parija had that worth as a man. As a friend he was genial, to his opponent he was Polite, as a good teacher he stooped to lift up the least among the taught, as a preceptor he was rich in counsel, in his sufferings he suffered heroically, as a father set an example of simplicity and self-denying love and among the common people he became a commoner with simplicity in manners and habits. He brought a sense of dedication to the cause of science, education and the welfare of his countrymen whom he served. His place is void is now. This can only be filled by men endued with a sense of dedication and loyalty to duty in the spheres of work they have been called to accomplish.

When I met Dr. Parija for the last time, he said "now we are in the railway platform waiting for our train to come and take us away". In my letter of condolence to him after the passing away of his good wife, I wrote "the only consolation we have is that we are at the end of our tether in this life". So it is, time is fleeting away, and those who take time by the forelock and make the best of the opportunities, will have no regret at the glow of the setting sun.

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