

Nanaji : Some reminiscences

He used to invite very many important people, not only from Delhi but from other parts of the country also. Many of them used to stay at the guest house. These were important guests whose needs and comforts had to be looked after. Persons like George Fernandes, Chandrashekhar, Madhu Dandavate, BD Jetty, Dr Karan Singh and many others of high eminence were frequent visitors. Nanaji used to entertain them and hold personal talks on matters of great importance.

SHRI Nanaji Deshmukh is no more. A mighty banyan tree has fallen leaving a huge void difficult to fill. But the strong and solid foundation he laid and the model role that he played, I am confident, will ensure the continuity and healthy growth of his great visionary projects.

When Poojaniya Balasaheb Deoras, the Sarsanghachalak, asked me, immediately after the lifting of the emergency, to go to Delhi and assist Nanaji Deshmukh, the Chairman of the Deenadayal Resarch Institute in the capacity of its Director, my heart missed a beat or two looking at the formidable challenge it involved, and fascinated by the immense potentialities it held out. Nanaji was no stranger to me. I knew him very intimately. We had worked together in Bharatheeya Jan Sangh. He was a very hard taskmaster who spared neither himself nor those who worked with him.

When Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan launched the country-wide "Total Revolution Movement", Nanaji Deshmukh was one of his most trusted lieutenants. Alarmed by the sweep and support for the movement Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed emergency to suppress it and put all the country's opposition leaders behind the bars and tried to snuff out the flames of democracy, Nanaji went underground, toured across the country incognito, united all democratic forces, built up a mighty movement for resistance and restoration of democracy, successfully fought against Indira Gandhi's autocratic regime and brought unprecedented electoral success to the opposition. That led to the formation of the Janata Government at the Centre. Nanaji's stature as a national leader rose sky high.

Morarji Desai, the new Prime Minister offered Nanaji Deshmukh the prestigious and powerful post of the Cabinet Minister for Commerce and Industry. But Nanaji declined the offer saying that what he wanted was transformation of the society by working among the people, and that also among the rural masses

which cannot be achieved through governmental authority. This single act of turning down the much coveted Cabinet Minister's office added immensely to the prestige and charisma of Nanaji.

He offered me the room adjacent to his own personal suite. But I preferred to stay at Keshav Kunj, the RSS Headquarters. I had a feeling that to be too close to such a powerful personality may not be very comfortable. But he was always accessible. I could watch him at close quarters, almost all the hours of the day. Every morning there used to be such a large number of visitors waiting in queue, people consisting of all segments of the society right from ministers, political leaders, executives, and poor farmers from far off villages etc., each one with some problems or requests or prayers for help. It took all his morning time to meet them and listen to them. Besides these, he used to invite very many important people, not only from Delhi but from other parts of the country also. Many of them used to stay at the guest house. These were important guests whose needs and comforts had to be looked after. Persons like George Fernandes, Chandrashekhar, Madhu Dandavate, BD Jetty, Dr Karan Singh and many others of high eminence were frequent visitors. Nanaji used to entertain them and hold personal talks on matters of great importance. This gave me the rare opportunity to come in touch with people who mattered in public life and to learn a lot of valuable lessons. An unforgettable personality who used to frequently visit and spend long hours with Nanaji was the formidable doyen of Indian Journalism Ramnath Goyanka the Chairman of Indian Express group of papers.

Nanaji's room had no chairs or tables. It was simple, but elegant and truly reflected his personal style. He used to squat on the carpet. For writing he had a small desk. Friends visited him there. Of course, for distinguished visitors there was always a neatly arranged VIP room with its wall decorated with a life-like portrait of Shri Gururji.

Though his headquarters was Deenadayal Research Institute, New Delhi, his heart was away in the rural areas he had selected for development work. At that time, Gonda District in UP was his prime concern. He had also selected rural areas in Maharashtra and Bihar. He had to keep in close touch with those distant areas

and most of his time he spent there, travelling, planning, executing and overseeing the various development projects - most of them quite original and innovative.

The idea of deploying young married couple as life workers- Jeevan Vritis- was the brain-child of the hard core pragmatist in Nanaji. He knew from his experience in the RSS that it was difficult to get life workers who would remain bachelors all through. Even more, for working in a rural society, among the common people married couples will be more natural and suitable. Only they should have deep dedication to live a life of utter simplicity.

He had wide contacts among the circle of great industrialists who had built their own empires. I saw that they had immense respect for him. They trusted his sincerity and commitment to the poor. Nanaji knew the fine art of extracting money from such sources and spending it in the poverty stricken rural areas for the welfare of the villagers. He was frequently on tour. Though he had an authoritarian trait in him, he also knew how to delegate authority to trusted persons at different levels. It was my experience that so far as the ideological aspect of Deen Dayal Research Institute is concerned, he delegated full autonomy to me and also guaranteed adequate financial support. He appreciated my organising frequent seminars, symposia and lecture series to which most eminent people were invited. Nanaji's fame and the institution's name had such a magic effect that anyone who is invited would feel it an honour to come and participate. Towering personalities like Morarji Desai, Swami Ranaganathanda, Justice Chandrachood, Justice VR Krishna Iyer, many Vice Chancellors and eminent academics had been our guests of honour and very prestigious programmes were regularly organised.

When I broached the subject of starting a quarterly Journal to spread the message of Deenadayal Research Institute, he was



all enthusiasm and also promised adequate financial assistance through regular advertisements. He also encouraged me to select my own assistants. There was no dearth for suitable subject matter because the country's most well known writers were eager to contribute to the journal. The name of the journal was selected by Nanaji himself, Manthan. Within a short while, it became a prestigious journal and gained scholarly acceptance.

Nanaji was a great visionary who wanted to transform the society, accepting all the good aspects of modernity while keeping deeply rooted in the culture of the land. This required immense pragmatism and also co-operation of a good number of talented people from many fields. He was fortunate in having all this at his command. He had the extra-ordinary capacity to take co-operation from all, without interfering with their freedom of initiative. At the same time he could gently guide them whenever necessary; keeping close watch over everything that was happening and giving timely encouragement. He was a rare personality combining in himself the qualities of an RSS Pracharak, the Gandhian commitment for rural development and his own innovative and imaginative creative genius. Nanaji was one who believed in solid work and despised empty oratory. He opted out of power to be at the service of the nation at the grass-root level. He was not enamored of party politics and politicians. He knew most of them too intimately to put much faith in their words. In fact those who knew him closely know how distressed he was at the way Indian politics was drifting and deteriorating day by day. He used to frequently circulate letters expressing his feelings of depression and calling upon people who mattered to set their hearts on improving the situation by active intervention as well as personal behavior.

Media calls Nanaji a social activist. But he was not one in the usually accepted sense of the term. Social activists of today generally follow the modern western paradigm. Nanaji was radically different. He was a system builder - a truly Bharatheeya system, based on our cultural and spiritual values, tuned to the needs and requirements of the present situation. That is what he attempted in Gonda and successfully executed in Chithrakuta group of villages- establishment of a miniature Rama Rajya. That is his real contribution. He was closer to Gandhiji and Shri Gururji than any so called social activists.

Chitrakut was his last and lasting contribution - a unique success story in the history of social transformation. Valmiki made Chitrakut immortal through the epic Ramayana. Nanaji immortalized both Chitrakut and himself by his monumental achievement at this holy, historical spot.

(On hearing about the sad demise of Nanaji, P. Parameswaran sent this touching piece. The writer is Director Bharatiya Vichar Kendra Trivandrapuram and a senior Sangh Pracharak)

P Parameswaran

Reverence to veteran leader Nanaji Deshmukh

Darien, IL: Chicago based Indian community and prominent organizations namely India Development Coalition of America (IDC-America), India Development Service (IDS USA), Ekal Vidyalyaya Foundation, Sewa Inter-national and Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS US) held a memorial service on March 7, at Indian Prairie Library in Darien, IL, and paid rich tributes to Sangh Parivar veteran, former Rajya Sabha member, and Founder of Deendayal Research Institute, Padma Vibhushan Nanaji Deshmukh, who passed away in the temple town of Chitrakoot, India. Born in Kadoli in Maharashtra-tra, Nanaji Deshmukh founded the Deendayal Research Institute and was credited with exemplary work in education, health and rural self-reliance. He was also instrumental in carrying out a social restructuring programme in over 500 villages in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh States of India. He also established the Chitrakoot Gramodya Vishwavidyalaya — the country's first rural university — and was its chancellor. The Padma Vibhushan awardee had willed that his body be donated for medical research.

Dilip Thatte welcomed the guests and in his opening remarks expressed deep grief on the sad demise of veteran RSS worker, social contributor and a role model to the generations to come, he also recited Shlokas from Bhagavad Geeta and explained the meaning of it in the context of Nanaji's life. He asked the audience to stand up to observe silence for 2 minutes to pay homage to Nanaji. Amrit Mittal paid his tribute by garlanding the picture of Nanaji and by lighting the traditional Indian lamp. Amar Upadhyay offered flowers.

A PowerPoint presentation prepared by the students of Washington University who visited the Deendayal Research Institute (DRI) in Chitrakoot, UP, was presented and also a DVD on the entire saga of DRI right from it's concept of integral humanism, source of inspiration, details on formation on the basis of Mahatma Gandhi and Deendayal Upadhyay's concepts of rural development, self reliance, rural health, agriculture, education, irrigation, use of solar light and many other innovative projects being implemented at Chitrakoot was played. Both presentations covered all aspects of the life before and after DRI's work at Chitrakoot and surrounding areas due to which the audience could learn so much about the total transformation that took place by the hardwork of Nanaji and the team of selfless volunteers he inspired.

Nanaji's life right from his birth, hardships, work as a RSS Pracharak, formation of Bharatiya Jan Sangh, on his organizational skills, his vast relationship with Indian leaders in socio-economic-political strata be-longing to different ideologies, his efforts and success in bringing all together for India's upliftment was narrated by Prasad Gar-khedkar of HSS. Dr. Hari Lamba, Mohan Jain, Amrit Mittal, Shridhar Damle spoke about their experience of visiting Chitrakoot, and meeting with Nanaji. They spoke in detail about working on several projects such as solar lighting of several villages, rural health and education related services. Dr. Lamba talked about the fund raising efforts, help by Rotary International, Tata Energy Research Institute and the multiplying effect that he witnessed during the fund raising efforts.

Pralhad Patil of Sewa International, USA spoke about the immense contribution that Nanaji made and if we could contribute by any means to such noble movements. Kaushik Joshi of Chinmaya Mission Chicago read the message of Jiwan P Sondhi of Michigan and Dr. Vilas Pal read a beautiful poem written by Jaya Ji Kamrani of Georgia. Similarly Dilip Thatte talked about several messages received by the event organizing team from prominent people like past President of India Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam, Dr. Walter Anderson. Tim Somers of IDCA read the message sent by Dr. Hutchison. Common factor from these messages was nothing but their absolute appreciation of the work of Nanaji and DRI team, it's importance and how it inspired them to contribute to the movement started by Nanaji. Dilip Thatte thanked the attendees for attending the memorial service.

By A Correspondent

