

LEST WE FORGET C.G.K. REDDY

C G K Reddy (CGK to almost everyone) showered affection on me since I was born, and I was close to him since my childhood. I always knew that he was not an ordinary person, but intimacy and proximity made it difficult for me to see him in proper perspective. One can become insensitive and inured to greatness and take it for granted. However, in the days before and after his death, I heard a large number of people of varying ages and backgrounds talking about him and the way he conducted his life. I began to jot down these descriptions and a picture quickly emerged of a person who was unique and outstanding.

There were four dimensions to CGK that earned the affection and respect of those whom he came in contact with -- his managerial ability, his values, his interactions with people and his character.

It is well known that CGK had quite exceptional managerial ability. Driven by unwavering commitment to the tasks that he undertook and the organizations that he believed in, and backed by his extraordinary inter-personal skills and ability to manage people by earning their loyalty, respect and affection, CGK distinguished himself as a builder of organizations. His contributions to the establishment of *Deccan Herald* and the *Research Institute for Newspaper Development* (to mention only two institutions) were immense. Even in an established institution like *The Hindu*, CGK could make significant contributions and endear himself to both the old guard as well as the new generation. Having humility and being trusting, he delegated well and could draw out the initiative of the people he worked with. As one of his staff said: "He was very considerate to the views and proposals put forward by the workers" Being intelligent and analytical, he could cut through to

the core of organizational problems very quickly. No wonder that he earned a reputation of being a highly efficient and effective manager!

But it was CGK's values that made him a special person. Like the stone-breaker who distinguished himself from other stone-breakers who merely broke stones, "CGK broke stones to build a monument". CGK's life was guided by a vision -- a vision of a humane, just and equitable society. It is no coincidence that he was a socialist. He was an extremely principled man. For the sake of principles, again and again, he unhesitatingly forsook career, comfort, security and all the good things of life that he loved. In 1946 when he was 25, he gave up a secure job with bright prospects as a marine engineer to become a political activist; when he was 54, he jeopardized a cushy job in the communications field to challenge the might of Indira Gandhi's Emergency. Age and the responsibilities of a *grahastha* did not erode his principles, as they are wont to do. To the end, he devoted himself to just causes -- when he died, he was the President of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (Karnataka).

Some of his values were very unusual. He said to my aunt and me in the hospital: "I have not harmed anyone!" At first I took that to be like a batsman reporting his score in an innings; actually, it was more than that -- not harming people was the expression of an ethical principle. I was astonished because I had never heard of that as a value to be pursued.

It was above all in his relationship with people that CGK was remarkable. He had a warm and loving nature. He assigned a special importance to the people with whom he came into contact. A few days after his death, my wife wanted to place an order with a lady who undertook to make Mangalore idlis for parties. Instead, this lady began to recount her sorrow at CGK's demise elaborating on how he would

always find time to chat with her every time he came to pick up an order. He had a tremendous ability to give and receive affection.

On the day of his death when his mortal remains were lying bedecked with flowers, I was in deep sorrow, feeling that my loss was very special because of my relationship with CGK and his relationship with me. After all, he had given me a lifetime of affection, inspiration and encouragement, and in return, I gave him over six decades of hero-worship, respect, affection, friendship and loyalty. Then, I looked around the house of mourning. I saw his friends of his age group, his socialist comrades, a host of nephews and nieces and their spouses, my children and their cohorts, and even our children's children. They were all grieving, each one feeling that they had had a special relationship with CGK; he had made all of them feel special to him.

He was able to relate to people of all ages and all backgrounds. He could do this effortlessly because he was very generous, extremely considerate, completely non-hierarchical and genuinely tolerant. We value people who have any one of these qualities; CGK had them all. CGK was imprisoned in 1943 for three years for conspiring against the King as a member of the Indian National Army and I have heard from one of his jail-mates many instances of his generosity -- for instance, whenever he received a stock of cigarettes from his relations he would always leave packets around carelessly so that his jail-mates could help themselves to this scarce and prized commodity. Even after death, he was generous; he donated his eyes.

His generosity was not restricted to money and things. Unlike many people who are psychologically incapable of complimenting others and feel that they will lose stature if they praise the efforts of others, CGK was very generous with praise and encouragement. A young and aspiring writer who was encouraged by CGK just

said to me: "His loss is irreparable!" CGK's ability to endear himself to others was helped by his tolerance (except of devious, scheming and unprincipled politicians!) and his progressive attitude. Over 40 years ago, he was one of the few elders in my family who stood by me (thereby incurring the wrath of my parents) when I courted and married a Maratha girl. And when his grand-niece married an American, CGK went to the wedding at Princeton to demonstrate his solidarity and affection. Incidentally, he is still remembered by the American guests for his charm and good cheer.

CGK neither genuflected before authority nor trod on subordinates; he was completely non-hierarchical and did not stand on formality. He would call up a nephew or a grand-niece and say: "I am coming for dinner. Keep some curds and rice for me!" and nephews, nieces, grand-nieces and grand-nephews would feel that a great honour had been conferred on them.

Because being human was far more important to him than being rich or powerful or intelligent, CGK could relate to the poor, meek and ordinary person. He did not have the snobbery of the rich, the disdain of the powerful or the contempt of intelligent. People were central to his value system; hence, his deep humanity. In this quality, he was assisted by his humility. Over 45 years ago, he wrote in my autograph book: "Before you rush into admiration of a hero, see his feet of clay!" Since he saw the clay feet of heroes, he could see the heroes in ordinary people. One of his colleagues wrote: "Even when he held the High office of Business manager in *The Hindu*, the love, affection and kind consideration he displayed towards me, a mere stenographer in the office, was something unique."

CGK was an intensely loyal person. When the merchant ship on which he was an engineer was torpedoed, shelled and sunk by a Japanese submarine near

Sumatra in 1942, CGK looked after, nursed and saved the life of his wounded ship-mate Shahbuddin from Dhaka. They drifted for days on the open sea without food or water until they landed in Sumatra and were captured by the Japanese -- as Shahbuddin describes in his autobiography.

Whereas the affluent often succeed by using people and forgetting help and favours, CGK made the repayment of debts a religion. In 1942, when he was 19 years old, he was tried along with 19 others for conspiring with the INA "to wage war against the King", an offence punishable by death. Out of the group, five were executed and the rest imprisoned. [Incidentally, even with the threat of death hanging over him, CGK did not invoke the help of his uncle Sir C.R. Reddy to use influence and save his life.] CGK never forgot his comrades, and went to extraordinary trouble in 1993 to organize a Memorial Event to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the martyrdom of his companions. He brought out a moving document "Lest we forget" containing the last letter of Abdul Khader to his father written a few hours before he was hanged by the British on September 10, 1943. When I said to CGK: "You have taken a great deal of trouble even though you are not well!" he replied: "It was debt that I owed them!"

On the day he was going in for the major surgery that resulted in death, he asked for a piece of paper and penned his last testament:

"I have had the good fortune to enjoy the affection, regard and generosity of friends, relatives and colleagues. These are what made my living worthwhile and have come to my aid in battling some very difficult times."

"May I say Thank you & wish you the best?"

CGK's character was marked by honesty and integrity, but what was memorable about him was his tremendous and infectious zest for life. He was always cheerful and had a good sense of humour -- he was reading a PG Wodehouse book in the Intensive Care Unit before his operation.. He was devastatingly charming. He was open and straight-forward.

Above all, he was extremely courageous. I was with him the evening the Emergency was declared in 1975 and he had decided to challenge it -- he was calm and composed though it was clear that there were great risks involved. What followed was the Baroda Dynamite Case and it is now almost sure that had not the people of India rejected the Congress in the General Election, CGK would have been incarcerated for life.

His courage persisted to the end. When he was being prepared for the operation that led to his death, I went to cheer him up, but failed and my eyes filled with tears at the prospect that I might never see him again. In response, he held my hand and said: "Don't worry; we will meet again and celebrate!"

Notwithstanding his joy of living, he was philosophical. In one of the discussions at the Vijaya Hospital during the last days, he looked back on his life and said that he did not suffer from either regrets or guilt. He was satisfied with a life well lived and loved. It was a composure and contentment that saints such as Ramana Maharishi are described as having attained. And CGK had achieved that state of mind even though he was not a religious person in the mundane sense! It could only mean that he had a detachment like the lotus of the Bhagawad Gita.

If I have given the impression that CGK was perfect and without blemish, CGK would have been the first to reject that description -- after all, he was human, particularly when not driven by heroic causes.

Though I hero-worshipped CGK and was inspired by him all my life, I wish I had written this thirty years ago. If I had, I would perhaps have tried harder to measure up to his standards and emulate his example in important ways. Now the best that I can do is to share this tribute to CGK, a prince among men, with a younger generation in the hope that they will try to live as he lived.

Professor Amulya Reddy

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