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Rohingya Issue

Inaugural Speech of President of India

Rajindar Sachar

The Presidents oath taking though is a routine function also is an event for people to judge whether the dignitary who is going to take over the highest office under the constitution has shed off his political loyalty to the political party and is now above groupism.

The inaugural speech of President R.N. Kovind passes a fair deal of test but it is unfortunate that he left a little chink which one wishes could have been avoided. In his address he showed himself to be rising above the din of regressive communal atmosphere that Modi government is encouraging when he very openly said; "Our diversity is the core that makes us so unique. In this land, we find mix of states and regions, religions, languages, cultures, lifestyles and much more. We are so different and yet so similar and united". This effect was spoilt by some BJP persons shouting Jai Shri Ram - a slogan totally out of place at the oath taking ceremony.

But a chink appened in this welcome approach and cast a little shadow. President rightly pointed out the massive contribution to the Indias freedom struggle and its development. He specially openly mentioned Gandhiji, "Patel", Ambedkar contribution. The reference to Deen Dayal Upadhaya though not very apt at the occasion may be papered over as loyalty to one of his earliest political leaders.

But what has hit the public is the total omission to mention Nehru even though he may not have praised him on his political achievement. But to talk of India's



Ram Nath Kovind takes oath as India's President

freedom movement without mention of Pandit Nehru is unacceptable, rather heresy. No one grudges praise for Sardar Patel, he could have mentioned him as strong leader and his vast contribution to the country - Sardar Patel's role in integrating princely states is incomparable. Nehru name should at least have found place, even though without praising his important role in the freedoms struggle. The truth is that whether you like it or not. Nehru massive contribution in the freedom struggle can not be put under cover.

I will give instance of how even being a committed member of Socialist Party of J.P. and Dr. Lohia since 1946 I faced a similar situation and how I dealt with in my humble manner.

It must be recognized that the reverence and hero worship for Nehru was normal and strong of my generation who had been brought up on the heroism, sacrifice and intellectualism of Pt.

Nehru. I remember basking in Nehru's presence when he came to Lahore to canvass for my fathers assembly election. Again when is 1945, after his release from prison, Pt. Nehru while going to Srinagar, broke his journey at Lahore - my father had invited him and some other important leaders for an informal get together at our place. I remember the awe, inspiration, admiration and respect with which all of us felt in his presence. And yet I behaved what many may call it unacceptable and foolish behavior of mine in 1955, which I confess in later time makes me somewhat feel stupid and yet it shows the different phases one passes through.

In 1955 Punjab High Court at Chandigarh was to be formally inaugurated by Pt. Nehru. I was then general secretary of High Court Bar Association. Pt. Nehru had come to Chandigarh the evening before. My father who was then the Chief Minister of Punjab invited Pt. Nehru for

breakfast at his residence in the morning. I was staying with father though my office was in another sector. Here was an occasion for a young man like me, who had hero worshipped Pt. Nehru from his waking period and amongst the earlier books which had inspired me were Nehrus Autobiography, and Letters from Prison to Indira. But then I had grown up, become a full blooded socialist and still in thirties. We in the socialist party were convinced (rightly or wrongly, time alone will tell) that Pt. Nehru, who had shown the vision of socialism to us had not kept that pace, and was following wrong policies. Our disappointment with his policies were deep, though I was a small fry in part of that milieu. So I told father that I will not be at breakfast table to receive Pt. Nehru, though my wife will certainly be there

along with my mother to play the hostess and look after the arrangements. My father and I had beautiful understanding and our sense of values and respecting each others views were the same. That is why he accepted my hesitation though he mentioned that I was being childish. I thereafter next early morning went out of the residence to my office before Pt. Nehru arrived for breakfast. I had even at that time that admiration and inspiration for Nehru that I could not think of being at home and be rude by not joining for breakfast. Of course I behaved absolutely correctly and all of us office bearers received Pt. Nehru with all the dignity and respect and deference due to him when he came to the High Court to inaugurate it.

Later on and now I laugh at my presumptuousness – a chit of

boy, whom Pt. Nehru will not even notice beating his chest by absenting himself and denying to himself such a close breakfast meeting with one of the greatest of leaders of India and who had been a hero of our family. But then I take it that such are the peculiarities of radical youth, the devil may care attitude and the almost fatalistic belief in the rightness of the cause of ones own party. But then I suppose that is the real difference between youth and old age – one may laugh now, but one does not demean it because at that time it represented what I like to feel was a youthful, genuine and unshakeable faith in a socialist society – which faith, fortunately I have still not lost.

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