

Late Ramesh Chandra Saharia: A tribute



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I was in Class V at the Scindia School, Gwalior, it was a usual routine in School getting up at 6.30 am and to get ready for a half an hour prep followed by breakfast and then school. It was morning of 8 February 1982 after my bath I did a regular prayer, when suddenly a small framed photo of Goddess Kamakhya Ma that I had kept in my cupboard fell, at that time I thought why this photo fell when no one had touched the cupboard. We had developed the habit of praying in the morning and evening at our home at Tangla (now under Udalguri district) as was being done by elders in our joint family. Later, I went to school as usual and came back at about 12.15 pm for lunch at the School mess, I could notice my House Mistress Mrs Indu Dhir with a worried look as we sat on the same table. As soon, I had finished my lunch, my house mistress informed me that my father was seriously ill and I have to go home immediately. Meanwhile my local guardian Mr Munin Das, IRS (retd) had come to School to pick me up and drop me in the airport for a flight to Delhi. In Delhi Airport, I could see my known and tensed faces among them was Late Anil Ratan Borthakur, the same night I was taken to Calcutta (Now Kolkata). Having seen the people around, I could feel that something was seriously wrong and I may have lost my father, so in the flight I asked the person that accompanied me that if I could have non-veg food being offered by the air-hostess. He said that I could have non-veg than I thought that my father was very ill. I stayed that night at Kolkata and early morning we took the flight to Guwahati. The first thing that I did when I boarded the flight is to go through the newspaper, when I saw the headline that Ramesh Chandra Saharia had passed away, the Assam Talk schedule with ASSU in Delhi had been postponed. I knew since then that my life has changed forever with the lost my father. I was taken to our official residence from where we went to Tangla for the cremation. Later, I correlated the incident of the sudden falling of Kamakhya Ma's photo and the time of his passing away. The journey from Dispur to Tangla was a story, which I still remember, with hundreds of cars and people on both side of the road and police man

standing with their rifle upside-down with bowed head. As Shri Sarat Phukan, IPS (retd) than DSP said the administrative management was under Mr K P S Gill, IPS (Retd) and they had a difficult time controlling the crowd in Guwahati and throughout the journey to Tangla. Shri Phukan also said that there were so many vehicles that the pilot of the convoy was at the Brahmaputra bridge and last car of the covoy was at Maligaon, he further said that they had a harrowing time controlling the crowd at Tangla's residence when the boundary wall of the compound broke down and then DC Late Ashok Saikia and SDO Jitesh Khosla had to come to control the crowd. People were everywhere on roof, vehicle tops and on trees. My father Late Ramesh Chandra Saharia passed away at the age of 52 on 8 February 1982. The homage paid by the thousands of people, political leaders, the police, officials the army led by the Brigadier M S Virk of Hatigargh cantonment and the air force showed how much people loved and respected him.

I could spent only 11 years of my life with my father but during that time and also today I could realize that the amicability, generosity, the modest personality and his genuine love for the downtrodden is difficult to seen today. He had inoculated lot of these characters from Gandhiji and by reading books from his childhood, being a book lover he had a collection of over 1000 books, binded volumes of all-important magazines (of 1950s,60s) and the newspaper collection one dated 16 August 1947. My grandfather had told me that once Gandhiji came to Tangla through train during the one of his visit to Assam for garnering support and raising funds. My Grandfather took my father in his lap then a baby (one year old Ramesh) to donate to the fund raising visit of Gandhiji, when Gandhiji saw my father (Baby Ramesh) Gandhi took my father in his lap and gave him a coin and also said that he will be a great man in his life.

My father had done his schooling from Mangaldoi Higher Secondary School and thereafter completed his graduation from Cotton College. My Grandfather Late Lambodhar Saharia was a great entrepreneur of Tangla, was then the CNF agent of Goodricke Tea Company, operated the first Bus service between Tangla and Guwahati, handled the post service and owned farmlands and citrus plantations. My Grandfather wanted that his son Ramesh should study further and as per his wishes my father went to Banaras Hindu University to complete his MA (Economics) and LLB. In spite of education background, he could have taken up a lucrative job, however my father preferred to stay back at Tangla and joined Tangla High School as Headmaster. His love of the place and his aim for developing this backwards region of the state was the reason for his staying back in Tangla. As I have heard, he later felt that to develop a place you require support from the government machineries and he realized that could only be possible if he joins politics. My father resigned from the Government service and contested the general election in 1972 as a Congress Nominee, won the elections, and became an MLA from 64 Panery Legislative Assembly Constituency. During his initial tenure as an MLA, he focused on education by establishing a number of schools in the interiors areas of Darrang district (Now under Udalguri District) and a College at Tangla. He always felt that only through education that one could develop a place and he himself got associated with a number of socio-cultural organisations. His truthfulness in his service was seen again in 1978 Legislative Assembly elections, when people from Panery constituency and different places Darrang district donated money to run the election campaign, several villagers came and contributed two to five rupees. He won the elections and later became a Cabinet Minister of Forest under the Chief Ministership of Late Jogen Hazarika and later Minister of Home, Revenue and other departments.

As a child I had done my initial schooling in Auxilium Convent, Tangla thereafter I have done my schooling (Clas III & IV) in Guwahati before joining Scindia School in Class V. I stayed with my father at his official residence at Dispur during my schooling in Guwahati and at that time, I could not understand much about politics but I do hear the discussions about politics during that period. During the second term of my father, the state of Assam was passing through a very challenging time of unrest due to Assam agitation. Moreover, being the Home Minister, my father had a lot of responsibility and as I have heard that, he tried to handle the situations using the least force and he even visited Gauhati University for meeting the leaders of the agitation without security. While in politics he did suffer setbacks as he was supposed to be a probable candidate for the Chief Ministership of the state, many of his colleagues in active politics today and many of his close friends knew this, however he preferred to support one of his colleague for the Chief Ministership, who eventually became the Chief Minister of the state. My father may not have told anybody that he was hurt by the treatment he received from his colleague, he was simple, straight forward and truthful and if he would have been alive today I feel he could have sustained in politics today. One of his most remarkable characters was his humbleness and love for the people, he never changed his behavior towards the people or reaching out to people being in power. I have never seen him being angry with anyone during the years when I started understanding what anger is. I visit various places of Darrang and Udalguri districts, even today after 31 years after his death there would be many people telling me how my father had helped them and how amicable and humble person he was. Today is his death anniversary, I pray to almighty to bless his soul and bless me to follow his footsteps.

NB: Late Ramesh Chandra Saharia of Tangla town in Udalguri district was the founder Headmaster of Tangla High School and former home and education minister of Assam of .The article has been written by Dr.Dipankar Saharia,Coordinator of TERI (The Energy and Research Institution) India,Guwahati.Former ACS officer Dr.Dipankar Saharia is the only son of late Saharia.The article has been written on the occasion of 31st death anniversary of late Ramesh Chandra Saharia on February 8, 2013.

- by Dr Dipankar Saharia

editor

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