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To: Soumya Swaminathan - MSSRF <doctorsoumya@mssrf.res.in>

Subject: Salute to a great human being

Dear Dr. Soumya,

I am Dr. C.O.Rangad from Shillong.

The sad news of the passing away of Dr. Swaminathan filled me with remorse and I wrote to Dr. Bhavani expressing my deep sense of loss and she kindly gave me your email ID. His passing away has left a vacuum which would be impossible to fill or replace.

My earliest exposure to him was, as a post graduate student of the College of Agriculture, Solan, Himachal Pradesh, I used to go to IARI (by the night bus) in the mid 70s, to listen to his lectures and come back by the night bus again on the same day. I would be absolutely mesmerized by his lectures and by his personality. Little did I dream that many years later I would come in contact with the great towering icon himself.

It was in 1988 that he was scheduled to come to the ICAR Barapani for a 5 day regional workshop on Paddy and I, from the state government, was declared as the protocol officer to look after all his needs. (since he was declared as a state guest). I was petrified! How was I, a mere class II government officer, going to talk to such a colossal national figure and that too for 7 whole days ! As protocol dictated I went to fetch him from Guwahati airport along with the pilot vehicles and police escort. As soon as he came out of the airport I introduced myself and escorted him to the car. I was about to get in the front of the car when he stopped me and asked me to sit with him. I couldn't believe it! but got in just in sheer reverence to his wishes. I couldn't say a word , but he was so affable and spoke to me asking various questions.

In those days the Guwahati - Shillong road was a 2 lane road and there were a lot of traffic snarls. In every jam the escort police would jump out and clear the road. He was so surprised. He asked me why are they stopping the cars and getting us to move. I told him that whenever VIP cars move that was done. He was embarrassed and asked me to tell the police not to do that but that we could proceed normally even if it took some time. I had to tell him that he had been declared a state guest and that the police would not compromise with their protocol. That was the first of many things that drew me to his humility.

For 7 days I would be at his hotel by 7am to escort him to Barapani (about 16 Km from Shillong). The first morning I was outside along with the escort vehicles by 6.30am. Exactly at 6.55 he came out and when I wished him good morning he asked me if I have been waiting long. I said 'only 15,20 mins Sir'. He immediately chided me that from tomorrow I should not wait outside but enter his suite. Unbelievably the first thing he did on stepping out was to go to the police cars where the personnel were waiting, and asked them 'did you sleep well? you must be tired yesterday'. The police couldn't say a word but remained in stiff attention. From then on for 7 days I was blessed to sit with him in the car and listen to him as he talked to me like a friend. We talked a lot of things everyday as we drove down and back. I was truly moved by his humility and humanity. For such a great figure to be talking to a young officer with genuine interest was unbelievable for me. I attended all the sessions from 8am till 7-8 pm. What struck me was his tenacity to sit through all the sessions (mostly him as the chair) and after every session he would summarize the entire session with such accuracy and brevity.

On the last day as we left the hotel he presented me with his biography and on the inside cover he had written in his own handwriting " to my dear friend....." there were 4 lines he wrote to me. This remains my most cherished possession till today.

On the last day as we were driving down to Guwahati he invited me to come to MSSRF and see the projects. After he left, I made a proposal to the government to visit Chennai and MSSRF which the government sanctioned. So I came to Taramani and stayed for 5 days and visited all the projects. Professor spent almost an hour with me on my final day at Taramani for discussions. In the subsequent years I was privileged to have the opportunity to visit MSSRF several times for various seminars and workshops and each time I have always made it a point to pay my respects to him and he was always so gracious to spare some time to meet me and interact with me.

I was always awestruck by his monumental achievements and personally he spoke with me as a friend while I was totally enamored by his sheer presence. He was a true Gandhian to the core. He has been, and will remain, an inspiration for me and indeed the countless scientists, farmers and the community at large.

For me, his passing away has truly left a void and a feeling of sadness but I also feel a sense of happiness and gratefulness to God that I have also lived in an era where such a giant as the Professor also lived and I had the honour to meet him and share his thoughts and views. Such figures rarely come in the course of history and form a milestone in the history of the nation, indeed, of the world.

Legends never die! and I believe his legacy will live on with the MSSRF and the dedicated and passionate people who have had the honour and privilege to work side by side with him and imbibed his values and through the millions whom he has touched and affected.

I, for one, deeply mourn his passing away and feel the loss and pray for the eternal peace of his soul.

My heartfelt condolences to you and your bereaved family and the family of MSSRF.

With kind regards

Dr. C.O.Rangad
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