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IN MEMORIAM

## A protege's tribute

Sushma Swaraj was a leader with the stature and backbone to withstand political pressures as a minister

**M**Y ASSOCIATION WITH Sushma Swaraj goes back to 1977, when after the end of the Emergency, she became an MLA of the Janata Party and was made minister for cultural affairs by Chaudhary Devi Lal, becoming the youngest ever minister in the country at 25. I was the director in the ministry. She exuded warmth and trust and started addressing me affectionately by my first name Yaqoob, my being six years older than her notwithstanding.

I was newly married then and she became very affectionate towards my wife, a budding journalist, as well. She granted her an interview for the last page of a Sunday magazine—a first for both of them!

Her positivity and my enthusiasm ensured that we reached many landmarks in an otherwise lacklustre and nondescript department. A film star night by Sunil Dutt's troupe at Ambala for social causes was organised. Sushma ji decided that no one would be given free passes. The only two persons who complied were Sushma ji and I. I had to leave my three-month-old bride at home, which she probably begrudged me but never complained! A national award—Sangeet Martand—to Pandit Jasraj of Sirsa with a prize money of ₹1 lakh, a princely sum at that time, was another landmark. A Haryana *suwang* (a folk theatre form) workshop with Habib Tanvir and another with Balwant Gargi resulted in legendary productions which were sent to border areas to entertain our *jawans* for years thereafter.

Even after we moved on to different ministries, our association continued,

though there was increasing acrimony between my journalist wife and her. She never allowed my wife's hostile writings against her and her party to affect her relations with me. She always said we are different individuals and even defended my wife's freedom of expression.

In 2001, out of the blue, I got a call from Sushma ji saying that she wanted me to come to her ministry, Information and Broadcasting, as Director-General Door-darshan. I was then posted as principal secretary to the chief minister of Haryana, O P Chautala. The post considered the most powerful in the state. I thought it would be awkward to request him to relieve me of this job as he would consider me an ungrateful rascal. I therefore requested Sushma ji to speak to Chautala herself, which she promptly refused to do, saying, "Yaqoob, you know very well that your CM is hostile to me as I had opposed my party's alliance with his." On my persuasion, she kindly agreed to call him and the conversation I heard is best forgotten. I learnt quite a few original Haryanvi invectives. The politest refrain being "you want to ruin me by taking away my principal secretary".

A few days later she again called me asking if I could use some other influence to get my name forwarded to Delhi. Surely there were many in the CM's secretariat who would be happy to push me out. I used their "good" offices. And it worked.

When the news about my appointment as DG DD spread, she faced a barrage of attacks from BJP leaders, including very senior ones, for appointing a Muslim to such a sensitive post, one with an anti-BJP wife to boot. Only a leader of her stature and backbone could have withstood the pressure. The complimentary words of faith and trust she used for me have always moved me. It transpired that a regular on me and her defence was that attack on feature. She was so cultured that she didn't even mention these conversations to me and I got to hear of them from her staff.

At DD, she gave me a free hand, especially as I was the first direct recruit for Prasar Bharati and she extended her full support in all my initiatives. The introduction of DD Bharati, a unique channel for women, children and culture, within a month of my joining set the tone. DD India, narrowcasting (local broadcasting from our TV towers) and later setting up of DD Archives on the first Pravasi Bharati Divas were some of the other milestones possible with her support.

One not so fine day, she was abruptly moved out of I&B to the Ministry of Health because of party infighting. I was the next target. Many people suggested that I am being moved out for being a Muslim, which I did not countenance. My belief was that my being considered a protegee of Sushma Swaraj was the real reason. Being labelled a "protegee" of a great leader like her is a matter of pride for me.

Sushma ji was an original thinker and doer par excellence. One of her achievements I can never forget was to declare film production as an industry, a demand that had been rejected for decades. In the one stroke, she killed the phenomenon of the underworld financing in the film industry as it became bankable. Has any one ever heard the name Haji Mastan here since?

My last meeting with her was on June 13, when I went to her home to inquire about her health. Rumours were rife that she had been "dropped". I inquired why

she had chosen to withdraw from active electoral life. She said that ever since her kidney transplant, she was advised by her doctors to keep away from two things—dust and human physical contact. She said with a constituency which spread over 100 kilometres, and millions of constituents and friends, this was impossible. I had not seen her so happy in a long time. She was glowing. Who knew that this was the proverbial last flicker of a dying flame.

Ma'am, I love you.

## ARTICLE 370

**D**EMOCRACY IS ALWAYS by the people, for the people, and of the people—it is always representative of the will of the people. In a constitutional parliamentary democracy, the most legitimate means of expression of this will is through elected representatives. The Indian Constitution gives Parliament the legitimate power to express this will, while expressing which, Parliament looks to the Preamble as the guiding light in enacting or amending laws. The principles of justice and equality are building blocks of the Preamble. Unfortunately, post-independence India committed two Constitutional irregularities, which were against the principles of justice and equality—Article 35A, and Article 370. These provisions for Jammu and Kashmir were utilised as "special" provisions by leaders of the valley, and their allies governing in Delhi. Insertion of constitutional amendment 35A through a presidential order was a move that had no constitutional precedent. The Constitution, under Article 368, gives Parliament power to amend it. Bypassing parliamentary powers, 35A, which disenfranchised people of J&K from basic constitutional rights, was inserted through executive means.

On marrying a non-Kashmiri, Kashmiri Muslim women lost their right to get government jobs, settle in Kashmir, or send their children to government schools. However, a

## A win for democracy

The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, portends a future of hope

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Kashmiri woman marrying a Pakistani retained the right to settle in J&K, and was eligible for a permanent resident certificate (PRC). This acute gender discrimination violated the spirit of the Constitution, and was also a threat to unity and integrity of people.

Article 35A also denied basic right to life to more than 4,000 families, who migrated from west Pakistan. They were not entitled to any land, and have been living as refugees for the past 60 years. Even the 200 Valmiki families who were brought from Punjab to J&K following a cabinet decision in 1957, to be specifically employed as *safai karamchari*, were not qualified for government promotion. Their children could not take

admission in government education institutions, nor were they eligible to apply for government jobs. In short, the son or daughter of a *safai karamchari* had no other option but to be one too. Political leaders who claimed represent the downtrodden would always look the other way at this denial of right to life to Dalits in the Valley.

More than one lakh Gorkhas, who historically serve in the Indian Army, suffer from social, economic and educational backwardness. Scrapping of 35A gives social and economic justice to the *suwang* of Kashmir.

The common narrative on J&K consciously overlooked the voice of Jammu, and Ladakh. Recently, when Mehbooba Mufti



State Legislature. Neither the spirit, nor the operatives of Article 370 indicate the necessity of consultation and concurrence from the J&K Legislative Assembly before making any constitutional changes.

By continuing with a temporary article perpetually, a constitutional irregularity was committed for political convenience. The Preamble speaks of "We, the people of India". It was unfathomable that a separate Constitution, flag, and proxy dual citizenship in the name of PRC would continue in the Valley for seven decades. In the name of preserving *Kashmiriyat*, Article 370 pulled away any investment opportunity in the Valley, leading the state to run the highest unemployment rate. Even J&K's share in new projects announced decreased to a historical low of .02%, as per CMIE data. With more than 40,000 lives lost in Kashmir, and countless soldiers martyred in the line of duty despite continuous talks with all possible stakeholders, there was no other option but to address the genesis of the turmoil. After all, *Kashmiriyat* needs to create progressive opportunities for all people of Kashmir—Muslims, Valmiki, Gorkhas, Bakarwals, Pandits—equally. By passing the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill, 2019, India has moved away from 70 years of turmoil to a future of hope and prosperity. The Bill upholds constitutional morality, and, for the first time, permits the application of the entire Preamble of India to the J&K region.

## CUSHIONING COTTON

# Measures to tap global potential

SHUNMUGAM

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Views are personal



Agencies should work towards enhancing the availability of adequate quantities of desired quality seeds at a subsidised rate

**A** THIRD OF THE global cotton growing area in India, hybridisation and increasing adoption of BT hybrid cotton varieties has turned India into a major exporter of cotton in the last decade. India was crowned the largest cotton producer in the world in the crop year (CY) 2015-16. In CY 2018-19, the cotton crop fared poorly due to a 20% rainfall deficit, with an estimated 14% reduction in production. Last years' production was also lower by 11% over decadal average cotton production of 352 lakh bales. As the farmers contributed to 'Cotton Revolution' of the last decade, mill consumption also expanded by over 30%. Increasing quality awareness and widespread use of hybrid seeds, led to India's cotton exports witnessing a growth until CY 2017-18, despite lower stocks. Lower crop estimates for 2018-19 pushed Indian cotton millers off the cliff to seek out their raw material requirements through imports. Though the production estimates of the significant trade body are being contested by the stakeholders, the proof of production numbers is already in the increasing trend of cotton imports estimated at 31 million bales—highest in the last decade on the back of lower exports. Added to the lower production, is also a low stock of 13 lakh bales, which is a third of the decadal closing stock of 38 lakh bales.

Production numbers reveal that after reaching the peak of 398 lakh bales during CY 13-14, production has been south-bound. Domestic consumption and augmented export demand had kept the mill consumption clock ticking annually in the last decade. Increasing exports and mill consumption led to stocks moving to a low of 5% of the consumption in CY 18-19. Given that Indian productivity estimated as 502 Kg/hectare is lower than 1,751 and 944 of China and USA, respectively, one needs to see as to what ails India's production.

Productivity levels seem to have hit a plateau and pulling the country and farmers out of the same would require multi-pronged efforts. First, and foremost issue, is ensuring the availability of adequate good quality seed with traits such as drought tolerance, pest resistance, etc. A major reason for the significant reduction in crop output witnessed during 2018-19 remain the drought conditions in major growing areas and attack of the pink bollworm. Second, the adoption of better agronomic practices such as high-density planting of short duration varieties. This has the potential to increase yields to about 29% via lower exposure to pest attack, efficient use of water and other inputs while also suppressing weeds. Also, management practices such as in-situ soil and water conservation with bunds, integrated pest management, soil fertility testing and management, drip irrigation, etc., can have a significant impact.

Growing cotton varieties of high staple length is an important step towards augmenting the production and making available desired length of cotton fibre in the country. Adoption of better harvesting and post-harvest management practices will eliminate contamination, ensuring production and recovery of good quality of cotton that meets the requirements of domestic consumption as well as exports. Use of commodity derivatives platforms either directly or through aggregators will help the farmers lock in their prices and create quality awareness. This will encourage the farmer to adopt better agronomic practices.

Both the private and public sector agencies should work towards enhancing the availability of adequate quantities of desired quality seeds for the farmers at a subsidised rate. With the sowing of the new crop due in the next few weeks, the performance of monsoon will be a key factor for the output. Amid concerns of end-stocks to fall to an alarmingly low level, there is an urgent need for remedial measures to be taken, to reclaim the coveted position of being the top producing nation.

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