

Manmohan - The Intellectual

In the eighties, I ran an organization named 'Nachiketa Sangha', for the children and adolescents at Cuttack's Khannagar slum. Every month, we invited a few well known personalities to meet and interact with the children. The topic for interaction is selected by the invitee. We had once invited Bulubhai (Manmohan Choudhuri) to take part in one of these programmes. We had expected that he is a Gandhian, would say something about Gandhi, Vinoba, the independence struggle, or on some other similar topic; or even give some advice to the children. But he spoke about birds for two hours - which all birds he had seen on sides of Kathajodi River, their nature, humorous stories about them. The children also joined in, and talked of their experiences. It was not a drab one sided discourse, rather it was a friendly talk. Rather than Gandhi, the children were now getting more acquainted with Gandhian philosophy. They were getting aware about the nature's bounty at their backyard and about some colourful aspects about nature. They were enlightened about Gandhian theory, about Gandhi and about humanity's real aspect.

This is Manmohan Choudhuri, who never got entangled in the delicate working of Gandhian principles. All his efforts were in line of Gandhian aspect in tune with human living. He has not obeyed any false doctrine of knowledge, duty or devotion. He has not confined himself to any dictum. That's why he has said in his autobiography 'Kasturi Mruga Sama'- many lands in this world have been confined to fences built around them. Every individual will stay within such a land. He cannot move from one land to another land without acquiring a valid passport or visa. In page 515 of this book, he has explained how science, arts, literature, religion, political system, or the way of thinking have created such different boundaries. He admits that he has been an encroacher. Without a valid passport or visa, he has moved from one land to another without a bit of hesitation.

First he thought about the boundary in relation to education. Bulubhai, who has never gone to college has written about 30 books-on economics, politics, sociology and physics. He has broken the boundaries with his whole family. Father Gopabandhu Choudhuri, mother

Ramadevi, wife Sumitra Devi, uncle Nabakrushna Choudhuri, aunt Minati devi, sister Annapurna Maharana, brother in law Sarat Maharana, cousin sister Uttara and her husband Narayan Desai- all have involved themselves in the freedom struggle, have been imprisoned, and - keeping themselves from money and power politics- have worked full time for the nation. Not only in the country, this has been the only instance where at a time such a big family has whole heartedly dedicated themselves to the nation.

Nothing has kept Bulubhai confined-neither education nor anything else. At a time, he was a child educationist, artist, cartoonist, photographer, cinematographer and a bird lover. In 1935, at the age of 19 , Gandhiji appointed Manmohan as the reporter for his walk in Orissa . In the thirties, he was the youngest reporter and his film on bee keeping was probably the first of its kind. He was also probably the first who had good knowledge of the celestial world and he had his own observatory. It was at this observatory that I had the first glimpse of Jupiter's three big moons.

He was at a time a farmer, weaver, cobbler and carpenter. From making compost to making leather cases, from the invention of the machine for knowing the thread's thickness to finding a way to put up a mosquito net in an open field-all these give insights about the intellect and workmanship of Bulubhai. His nephew, the renowned scientist Dr. Jnanadev Maharana's recently published 'Mo Mamu', will throw more light on the life of this exuberant personality. It is a bitter fact that this multifaceted person is only known as a Gandhian social worker, though his political life is worth notable.

Bulubhai had been the director of the internationally famous research institute 'Gandhian Institute of Studies' at Varanasi. He has received his doctorate from the prestigious Utkal University and has also received many other recognitions from different parts of the world. He has written his autobiography and also twenty books in oriya, three in hindi and six books in English. He has published two hindi publications, one oriya publication and one english publication. 'Hata Bazarare Brahmagyana', written by him has won the state 'Sahitya Academi Award' and his autobiography ' Kasturi Mrugasama' has own the Sarala award. 'Exploring Gandhi', published by Delhi based 'Gandhi Santi Pratisthan' has seen many editions.

Bulubhai has proved to be more apt than the proficient poets at converting a sorrow to a hymn. Which father can start painting the portrait of his only son one or two days after his death at America and hang that portrait on his tenth rituals? At Kabir's eleventh day prayer meeting, Bulubhai had said "I want to live a hundred years to serve the nation". Bulubhai had taken birth on October 11, 1915 and died on 11th June 2003 at the age of 88. The life of Bulubhai is sure to inspire many for all times to come.