

Former Lok Sabha Speaker Rabi Ray passed away on March 6th, 2017

Noted Gandhian socialist leader and former Lok Sabha Speaker Rabi Ray passed away on March 6th at the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack following prolonged illness. Rabi Ray was 91 and is survived by his doctor wife, Mrs. Saraswati Swain. Son of Late Shri Ghanshyam Ray, Rabi Ray was born at Bhanragarh village of Khurda district of Odisha state on November 26, 1926. He shot into the limelight in 1946-47 when he was arrested along with others for lowering the Union Jack and unfurling the Tricolour at the Ravenshaw College (now University), Cuttack.

Rabi Ray was one of the closest associates of Rammanohar Lohia and one of the founders of the Young Socialist League (YSL) or 'Naujawan Samajwadi Sangh' in 1949. Lohia's visit to Odisha in 1948 and his advice to address the unprivileged touched Ray's heart. Following Socialist principles, he even refused to mention his caste in the examination form he had to fill at the Ravenshaw College. He did B.A., (Hons.). In the year 1953, he was elected joint secretary along with Shri Ladli Mohan Nigam and Shri Rangnath as general secretary in the foundation conference of Samajwadi Yuwak Sabha, held at Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi. In the year 1955, Rabi Ray organized SYS conference at Puri in Orissa and it was inaugurated by Shri Madhu Limaye. In 1956, Rabi Ray under the leadership of Dr Rammanohar Lohia, founded the Socialist Party in Orissa. In the year 1957-58, when Godey Murahari was elected General Secretary of Socialist Party, Rabi Ray became General Secretary of All India Samajwadi Yuwak Sabha. In the year 1960, he became the first general secretary of Socialist Party founded by Rammanohar Lohia.

In 1967, Rabi Ray was elected to Fourth Lok Sabha 1967-71, from Puri Lok Sabha constituency and was Leader of Samyukta Socialist Parliamentary Party while Lohia was a member of Lok Sabha. During Socialist movement he was imprisoned many times in connection with the various Satyagrahas launched by Socialist Party during 1960-74 and was imprisoned during emergency, 1975-76. In 1974 he was elected to Rajya Sabha. During 1977-79, he was General Secretary of Janata Party and from 25th January 1979 to 14th July 1979, and 28th July 1979 to 14th January, 1980 he was Union Minister, Health and Family Welfare under Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Charan Singh respectively.

However, his moment of glory came between 1989 and 1991 when he became Speaker of the 9th Lok Sabha and first one from Odisha, during the most tumultuous periods of Indian politics. He was elected to Lok Sabha in 1991, for the third time.

The mortal remains of Rabi Ray was consigned to flames at his native village Bhanragarh in Khurda district with full state honours on 7th March 2017. According to Chittaranjan Mohanty, a close associate of Rabi Ray, his body was first taken to Ravenshaw University and M S Law College in Cuttack, where he was the president of the students union and kept at Lohia Bhavan in Bhubaneswar for the people to pay their last respects before it was taken to his native place. Rabi Ray's nephew lit the funeral pyre at Bhanragarh village in the presence of hundreds of people including Chief

Minister Naveen Patnaik, his Bihar counterpart Nitish Kumar, former JD-U president Sharad Yadav, Bhubaneswar MP Prasanna Patsani, Food and Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Sanjay Das Burma and Athagarh MLA Ranendra Pratap Swain.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik condoled, Rabi Ray's death and described him as a veteran socialist leader. "As a union minister and Lok Sabha Speaker, Ray had established a rich tradition in the conduct of the House. He worked with commitment for socialist ideas and moral values in life," Navin Patnaik said Ray's death marked the end of an era, Nitish Kumar said the former Lok Sabha speaker was like a guardian for him and for many others in the socialist movement. Odisha government has declared one-day state mourning in his honour on Tuesday.

Rabi Ray was a towering personality in national politics, who believed in socialist ideology till the end and inspired many young politicians from Odisha as well as the country. During his six decades long political career, Rabi Ray did many developmental works in the district including the establishment of Krushi Viganya Kendra and Navodaya Vidyalaya. Rabi Ray was a champion of socialist politics and made significant contribution to socio-economic development of people of the State,

When Rabi Ray was the Speaker, VP Singh was the Prime Minister and Rajiv Gandhi was Leader of the Opposition. He was liked and respected by members cutting across party lines in the Lok Sabha for the high standards maintained by him.

He has widely travelled as Leader, of various Parliamentary Delegations and was editor, 'Chaukhamba' (Hindi) fortnightly and 'Samata' (Oriya) monthly journals.

Qurban Ali