

GG Parikh - A Modern days Dadhichi - A Profile

Veteran Socialist and freedom fighter, who participated in 1942 'Quit India Movement' Dr Gunvantrai Ganpatlal Parikh popularly known as GG, was born in Surendranagar in Gujarat on 30th December 1924. He was educated in Saurashtra, Rajasthan and in Bombay. A medical practitioner by profession, he was also a freedom fighter as a young man in the 1940s and has continued his struggle for the emancipation of the poor and the downtrodden till today.

GG, who is 95 (on 30th December 2018,) began his work for public service early in life. Part of an era in which political activism was prevalent among the youth, he was exposed to the ideas of fighting social oppression, injustice and inequality.

GG Parikh's romance with the national movement started at a tender age when he heard his future hero and a firebrand leader of that time, Yusuf Meherally's speech in 1942 at St Xavier's college and was immediately smitten. He became a cadet of the socialist cell in the Congress; and "Cadet Parikh", a student aged 18, was present at the historic Gowalia Tank in Bombay on the rain-swept afternoon of August 8, 1942, to back Mahatma Gandhi's call to the British to "Quit India".

The meeting, organised by the All India Congress Committee (AICC) passed the stirring Quit India Resolution, which proved to be the last nail in the coffin of the British Raj. GG was arrested and slammed into the Worli Jail for ten months. Later he joined the Congress Socialist Party a socialist cell within the Congress party in 1947. He was also the president of the Bombay unit of the Students' Congress in 1947. When country got independence and socialists within the Congress party decided to leave the Party in 1948, GG, also left the Congress party and joined the Socialist party and was very active during foundation conference of the Socialist party in 1948 at Nashik. Since then he was married to the socialist movement and actively participated in all its streams namely the Socialist party, Praja Socialist party and Samyukta Socialist party. After the merger of SSP and PSP, he joined the unified Socialist party in 1972 and when Socialist party was merged into Janata party in 1977 he was associated with Janata party till its merger in Janata Dal in 1988 and remained associated with the Janata Dal till 2000.

In the 1950s, GG started his medical practice in Mumbai and campaigned for socialism. When Maharashtra was being reorganised, and communal tensions rose, he started the Yusuf Meherally Centre (YMC) in a single room at the historic Gowalia Tank Mumbai in 1961 with the objective of integrating the people. "Yusuf was so popular that we wanted to make him a symbol of national integration. Moreover, millions of Muslims had sacrificed their lives during the freedom struggle but very few were remembered. Minorities need to be respected. So we named the centre after him," says GG.

During the Emergency, GG Parikh, was arrested on October 23, 1975, in connection with Baroda Dynamite case and interned in Delhi's Tihar jail. He was arrested just because he happened to know his party president George Fernandes and helped him during emergency days.

“During the freedom movement people accepted many new values much more easily and the same happened during the JP movement. Hence there is a need for sangharsh with rachna to effect basic changes in society. In view of this, the centre established the Yusuf Meherally Yuva Biradari to promote communal harmony and fight injustice” says GG.

In 1967, YMC opened a branch in Tara, where it functions from a 15-acre campus. Today the centre runs a 35-bed hospital, two high schools - Urdu and Marathi medium, where students are taught free of cost - promotes watershed development, women self-help groups, non-formal vocational training for the adivasis and production of products like oil, soap and pottery. The centre also opened branches in Kashmir after the earthquake and in Nagapattinam after the tsunami.

Dr GG Parikh's schedule belies his age. At 95, he travels the 90 or so kilometers to Tara in Raigad district, near Mumbai, on a weekly, and sometimes bi-weekly, basis and continues his medical work at his clinic in Mumbai for the rest of the week. He remained undeterred by an accident he met with some years ago when he slipped in between a train and the railway platform. The only reminder of that experience is a walking stick he uses.

While new projects are on the horizon in Tara, GG says he is still not satisfied. “My dream of an equal and just society is not yet fulfilled. Power needs to go to the tillers and toilers,” he says. As for his increasing age and physical fatigue, GG brushes it off saying, “When I was a medical student, I was taught that tiredness is psychological. Besides, I have to keep working until I realise my dream!” Dr GG Parikh has made rural development his life's mission.

“From our experience, we can say confidently that without rural development, the development of the country will be unsustainable. The current type of development and the rate of development are both unfortunate. When P. Chidambaram was the Finance Minister, he said that 85 per cent of the Indian population should live in cities. This is not possible, nor is it desirable. We do not say that the urbanisation process should be halted. No, it should go on, but it should not be forced. At present, it is forced. Rural development should be carried out so that people are not forced to go to cities. Rural employment should become a people's movement and the state should be committed to it. Right now.... the only employment being generated is for the city educated.”

Dr GG Parikh explains that both Gandhi and socialism need to be reinterpreted to make them relevant. “If the state owns the means of production, then exploitation will decrease – this is what Marx taught. And he was right except that we need a new, modified vision for the future

and we need to substitute ownership with technology. In our present growth model, the rich are getting richer and the poor are remaining where they are. We have the advantage of numbers. So we should develop technology for these vast numbers of people. Watershed development, non-conventional energy forms, village industries, organic farming are all ways to achieve rural growth and take advantage of the traditions that people are familiar with. Instead, after the 1990 reform process, we have forgotten this. Capital exploits labour and it exploits nature. Sooner or later both will take their revenge. Engels had said this way back and we are seeing it happening now. Concern for nature needs to be incorporated into socialism.” As far as reinterpreting Gandhi is concerned, Parikh believes that “Gandhi himself was very dynamic but Gandhians are not”.

For today’s Socialists he has a piece of advice “Socialists, who played a pivotal role in the freedom movement, and also, in all progressive movements, post-Independence, will undergo an interesting metamorphosis. There will be efforts to bring them together on a common platform and they will take to a people’s movement readily. Socialists had set up Rashtra Seva Dal (RSD) to combat the RSS. It still exists and may become more active. The trade union movement, faced with what they call third generation reforms, will take to streets under socialists and communists. And socialists will go green with global warming and the increasing inequality becoming important motivations. Hopefully, they will learn a lesson or two. When a tactic or strategy to achieve a given objective is made into an end, unintended results follow. This is precisely what has happened when the strategy that was accepted by some socialists to defeat Congress became their sole aim. And one more lesson needs to be learnt. A split in ideological party results in negating the very possibility of achieving its ideological outcome”.

GG we salute for your selfless service to the nation for more than seven decades.

Long live GG!

Qurban Ali