

## CONDOLENCE MESSAGES

“प्रसिद्ध राजनीति शास्त्री श्री रजनी कोठारी 19 जनवरी, 2015 को इस दुनिया से विदा हो गये. उन्हें हमेशा भारतीय राजनीतिक व्यवस्था की नब्ज़ पर हाथ रखने वाले पहले राजनीति विज्ञानी के तौर पर याद किया जाता रहेगा. ये वे ही थे जिन्होंने भारतीय राजनीति में 'काँग्रेस सिस्टम' और राजनीति में जाति की भूमिका को सबसे पहले रेखांकित किया. लेकिन वे सिर्फ एक अकादमिक के तौर पर ही अपनी भूमिका निभाने तक सीमित नहीं रहे. वे उन चन्द लोगों में से थे जिन्होंने आपातकाल के खिलाफ खुलकर बोला और लिखा.

उनका पूरा जीवन लोकतंत्र को इसके सच्चे रूप में स्थापित करने और इसकी रचनात्मकता, इसकी कमज़ोरियों, इसकी मजबूतियों आदि को बाहर लाने के प्रति समर्पित रहा. रजनी कोठारी ना सिर्फ एक प्रतिभाशाली राजनीति शास्त्री थे अपितु उन्होंने लगभग पचास वर्ष पूर्व ही सेंटर फॉर डेवेलपिंग सोसाइटीज जैसे संस्थान की परिकल्पना के साथ समाज शास्त्र के क्षेत्र में अतुलनीय योगदान दिया. लोकायन बुलेटिन और आल्टर्नेटिव्स जैसे जन-आधारित विकास को बढ़ावा देने वाले प्रकाशनों की परिकल्पना में उन्हीं का हाथ था. लोकायन उन्हीं का एक अद्भूत प्रयोग था जहाँ उन्होंने अकादमिक शोध और जन-संगठनों एवं आंदोलनों को साथ लाकर एक नयी राजनीति की तरफ देश को बढ़ाया. वे सिर्फ एक अकादमिक ही नहीं बल्कि वे एक 'एक्टिविस्ट' अकादमिक थे जिन्होंने पीपुल्स यूनियन फॉर सिविल लिबर्टीज के साथ मिलकर लोक-राजनीति को बढ़ावा दिया और दमित एवं शोषित वर्ग के अधिकारों के लिए संघर्ष किया. अनगिनत समाज-शास्त्रियों को मार्ग-दर्शित कर उन्होंने भारतीय समाज विज्ञान के क्षेत्र में अतुलनीय योगदान दिया.

मज़दूर किसान शक्ति संगठन आम लोगों के हितों और हक़ों के लिए संघर्ष करने वाले, लोकतंत्र में अटूट श्रद्धा रखने वाले और भारतीय समाज और राजनीति के अध्ययन को एक नयी दिशा देने वाले प्रो. रजनी कोठारी को सलाम करता है और उनके पद-चिन्हों पर चलने का संकल्प लेता है.”

अरुणा रॉय, निखिल डे, शंकर सिंह, लाल सिंह, भंवर मेघवंशी व समस्त एम के एस एस परिवार

“We remember Prof. Rajni Kothari as one of most influential public thinkers of our times who theorized the role of people’s movements in India and the third world and whose work continues to provide intellectual sustenance to the movements and the civil society at large.

Combining academics and activism, merging research and action, uniting intellectual and political work, Prof. Kothari's contribution to the realm of people's movements has been immense. Further, his critiques to established development paradigm and political systems accelerated his quest for alternatives that operated outside the framework of mainstream politics and brought him even closer to the space of people's movements. His direct involvement in the resistance against the Emergency and later through People's Union of Civil Liberty (PUCL) as well as constant involvement with struggles for people's rights and civil liberties over decades speak volumes about his committed activism. He was the first signatory to letter on Narmada issue to the then Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and since then, continued to be a pillar of support to various movements.

He was an inspiration and a mentor to generations of social scientists and activists alike. He founded CSDS and Lokayan, which are the premier platforms of research and interaction between intellectuals and activists respectively, and have been taking forward his belief that intellectuals must intervene in the political processes by linking critical ideas to political debates. His books and articles on themes such as politics, democracy, politicisation of caste, development, alternatives, have been guiding texts to understand and engage with the contemporary realities of India.

Through his tireless work as an ideologue, a scholar and an activist, he has left behind the legacy that attempts can indeed be made to produce a knowledge that goes beyond explaining the world to changing it. The National Alliance of People's Movements pays a heartfelt tribute to Prof. Rajni Kothari, our *saathi* and our guide in the struggles for people's rights, democracy and justice."

#### **National Alliance of People's Movements**

**(Medha Patkar** - Narmada Bachao Andolan and the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM); **Prafulla Samantara** - Lok Shakti Abhiyan & **Lingraj Azad** – Niyamgiri Suraksha Samiti, NAPM, Odisha; **Dr. Sunilam, Aradhna Bhargava** - Kisan Sangharsh Samiti & **Meera** – Narmada Bachao Andolan, NAPM, MP; **Suniti SR, Suhas Kolhekar, Prasad Bagwe** - NAPM, Maharashtra; **Gabriel Dietrich, Geetha Ramakrishnan** – Unorganised Sector Workers Federation, NAPM, TN; **C R Neelkandan** – NAPM Kerala; **P Chennaiah & Ramakrishnan Raju** – NAPM Andhra Pradesh, **Arundhati Dhuru, Richa Singh** - NAPM, UP; **Sister Celia** - Domestic Workers Union & **Rukmini V P**, Garment Labour Union, NAPM, Karnataka; **Vimal Bhai** - Matu Jan sangathan & **Jabar Singh**, NAPM, Uttarakhand; **Anand Mazgaonkar, Krishnakant** - Paryavaran Suraksh Samiti, NAPM Gujarat; **Kamayani Swami, Ashish Ranjan** – Jan Jagran Shakti Sangathan & **Mahendra Yadav** – Kosi Navnirman Manch, NAPM Bihar; **Faisal Khan**, Khudai Khidmatgar, NAPM Haryana; **Kailash Meena**, NAPM Rajasthan; **Amitava Mitra & Sujato Bhadra**, NAPM West Bengal; **B S Rawat** – Jan Sangharsh Vahini & **Rajendra Ravi, Madhuresh Kumar and Kanika Sharma** – NAPM, Delhi)

“Sitting here in Vadodara and thinking of Rajni Kothari a couple of weeks after his death, thick memories of our Baroda days- intellectually eventful and life-celebrating- prevail over the grief I felt when I got the news of his death. I would however like to postpone celebrating Rajni’s life in Vadodara to some other day and celebrate his work from the distance it allows me from Delhi and the CSDS.

First, it will be a mistake to view Rajni as an empiricist. Although he was firmly anchored in the empirical world of politics, his distinctive and lasting contribution has been to the political theory of democracy- not just of Indian democracy. All that he did as public intellectual, a political dissenter, a unique institution builder, as a friend, philosopher and guide to civil society movements, as human rights activist- all crystallized into a robust, distinctive political-theoretical formulations. His was a demo- centered theory where demos while relating to and participating in politics, structure their aspirations and activities and in the process transform the nature of state-driven politics and challenge the pure normative and elitist thinking on democracy. Rajni’s deep insights into these processes led him to formulate a new, dynamic political theory of democracy. In this sense, his contribution to democratic theory is distinctive and long lasting. More appropriately, he was the theorist of democratization. Political processes interested him more than personalities and events.

Second, he founded a new kind of political sociology. His work, for example, focused on what caste, the Indian family system and generally the Indian culture did to politics and Indian democracy. As a political sociologist, he did not view politics as a sub-system of society, but as an engine, a primary force of social and cultural change in India.

Third, Rajni had a knack and ability not only to come up with a bright new idea in response to challenging academic and organizational situations, but more importantly, to creatively embody the idea that would lead to a new desired reality.

Fourth, he deeply respected self-worth of every individual and had the ability to trust colleagues unconditionally bringing out the best in them. He was anti-hierarchical and anti-organizational, but far from being an anarchist.

Lastly, I regret I did not adequately play my role in CSDS in finding one or two younger colleagues who would carry further Rajni Kothari’s work on democratic theory and political sociology. I am particularly sad that I was not of much use to him in his final days.”

**DL Seth**

“It is about 25 years since I met the great man through Harsh Sethi, Smitu and then with Tapan Bose. The time I was able to spend with him in Delhi, Lahore, Islamabad and Kathmandu cannot be forgotten for the knowledge I received through oral exchanges, and which I found as valuable as reading his writings. I remember his ability to put younger and less informed interlocutors at ease and inspire them to be themselves. He was a humanist par excellence but it was the poor and the disadvantaged for whom he felt more deeply than anything else. When persons like Rajni Kothari leave we say an oak has fallen. Absolutely true in his case.”

**I.A. Rehman, Pakistan-India People’s Forum for Peace and Democracy**

I didn’t know Rajni Kothari personally and had not even met him until this last summer when I had the pleasure of having lunch with him at the IIC with Miloon Kothari, my friend, and his son. I have known only Miloon and my good friend Smitu, whose wisdom and warmth I still miss dearly. It felt great to be in the presence of a great mind during that lunch, and I didn’t miss the opportunity to snap a few pictures with him and Miloon. I could not have imagined that it would be my only meeting with him.

But it is apt to say that I knew Rajni Kothari very well indeed: his ideas, his research and his evident compassion for the small peoples of the world and his solidarity with them for the struggle towards a just world order and the deepening of Indian democracy. No one who grew up in India during the 1970s and 1980s could miss encountering the searing prose of Rajni Kothari in newspapers and magazines even if they didn’t read his more academic publications, as I began to do in the 1980s. Indeed, he was that rare model of a public intellectual – perhaps India’s first ever. If we define a public intellectual as one who contributes to the collective learning and clarification of values in the public sphere, Rajni Kothari was a towering example of one. His willingness to step outside the arcane and provincial boundaries of social sciences, made him a pioneer and more importantly, a global influence.

Whether it is through trenchant articles (such as his brilliant ‘Human Rights: Movement in Search of a Theory’), or through journals (such as Alternatives, which he cofounded), or through platforms (such as Lokayan or the World Order Models Project which he cofounded as well), Rajni Kothari influenced me and others as we tried to emerge as academics who do not lose their compassion, public engagement and their moral compass, following Rajni Kothari’s role model. With his passing and that of the other great Indian cosmocrat, Justice Krishna Iyer, a great generation is drawing to a close. But they have left us with a rich legacy which can only inspire that peculiar blend of action, ideas, analysis and principles, towards a just, democratic and peaceful India and the world.

**Professor Balakrishnan Rajagopal, MIT, Cambridge MA**

Professor Rajni Kothari is a true intellectual, enquiring into political and social behaviours objectively, and analysing the trends with a futuristic perspective and larger societal concern has been his pursuit. His writings influenced me while I was pursuing my post graduate studies in political studies at Kansas State University in mid-1960's. I remember being with him on a panel discussion at Baroda University early 1970's in a conference of Western India Political Science Association along with Professor Bhutt. Since then, he was never out of my mind next 35 years. It was his pioneering study on voting pattern in Kerala elections which elected the first Communist Party for power mid-1960's that influenced me to take to election studies prior to the elections.

Although a great personality, Rajni Kothari's contribution is not fully acknowledged across the country. Of course he never looked for or bothered about any recognitions. His life and pursuits deserve annual lecture series not just by CSDS but many others. His contribution should not be limited to any one organisation or even to one period of last half a century. My colleagues at CMS and I pay our tributes.

**Dr N Bhaskara Rao, Chairman, CMS**

“Your parents Rajni and Hansa were very important persons for us when we lived in India from 1981 to 1985. Trough their generosity and committment we learned so much about essential India.

I knew Rajni's views much before coming to India and relied on his writings for my academic dissertation (sort-of PhD). Chatting with your parents, and meeting Rajni's fine collegues at the Delhi University as well as Lokayan, we were deeply sensitized to the deep cleavages in the Indian society, and learned to appreciate the huge intellectual and moral efforts that your parents were part of. Most significant and visible for us was Rajni's leadership in the reporting of the Delhi riots of 1984. It has been truly a privilege to have such an intimate friendship with your parents, and also with your good self, as well as your brothers and the families of all of you. Wishing you fortitude at this difficult moment, and persistence in carrying forward Rajni's huge heritage, and continued success in building your own heritage(s).”

**Mikko Pyhala, former Finnish Ambassador to India**

“Please accept my deepest condolences on your father's passing. I only met him twice, through Smitu in the US, and I am very glad I did. I am always in awe at the amazing conceptual clarity and emotional strength of South Asian

intellectuals like your father, and I know the world was made richer by his life. May his teachings and aura endure in India and elsewhere as well.”

**Arturo Aescobar, Colombian-American anthropologist**

“I first met Rajni Kothari in 1988 along with Sam Pitroda although I had known of him and read him a decade earlier. My association grew and I was in the Planning Commission when he became a Member for a brief while in 1990. I kept in touch with him every now and then. What struck me most is his willingness to engage patiently with someone who had different views from his on a variety of issues like globalisation, science and technology, economic reforms, large-scale irrigation projects, people's movements, the Congress Party, etc. He was ever so gentle in putting his across his firmly held beliefs and ever so generous in listening to other perspectives as well. Through him I got to know a remarkable cohort of public intellectuals who worked at the CSDS.

To say I learned much about my own society from reading him is an understatement. To say that I was began to get more and more influenced by his way of thinking as I got older and wiser is to state the obvious. To me Rajni Kothari was that very rare Indian-a mentor who never became a tormentor.”

**Jairam Ramesh, former Minister for Environment and Forests**

“Having known you almost my entire life, I had the wonderful privilege of a meaningful engagement with your father, both, as an admirer of his intellectual acumen and as an observer of his gentle and gracious presence with your family at your I Court Road house. As a theoretician of contemporary political philosophy in India with genuine proximity to the political process as well as its practioners at one point in time, he engaged with utmost sincerity and hope for the country. His subsequent disaffection with that process, and the resulting leadership role in forging widespread civil-society engagements in the form of PUCL and Lokayan, and the creation of a free from fetters research hub at CSDS, were for me the unique symbols of graceful yet persuasive and vigorous dissent. These institutions will forever remind us of your father's intellectual acuity and prescience. His contributions to understanding India's democratic experience and its flawed meanderings through menacing violence, congealment of privilege and the resultant burgeoning miasma of hopelessness, will always inspire people like me to look for rational and meaningful alternatives.

At a personal level, however, it was the calm in your father's demeanor which stood out for me whenever I met him at your home -- the charming and effortless alternative to the characteristically distant and dour father figure which was the familiar model around at that time. The tender and compassionate relationship that he shared with your mother and its everlasting presence in your own life and that of Smitu and Milun is something which was so apparent and beautiful in your household. I was privileged to be a witness to it so many times in the days of our youth and lucky to have been a recipient of its rewards in the shape of our continuing friendship. Today, I genuinely feel sad at the passing of that era but hope to stand steadfast for its continuity in our lives and that of those we love and cherish."

**Pallav Das, film-maker, one of Kalpavriksh's founders**

"I walked my lonely path looking up to him as inspiration."

**Ganesh Devy, linguist, BHASHA**

"We celebrate his life and all that he stood for. But we mourn the passing of an era that people like Rajni represented and above all the philosophical legacy as well as the institutional activism that he nurtured and built. It was during the 1984 violence and subsequently that I really got to interact with him - a privilege I shall not forget."

**Lalita Ramdas, former Chair, Greenpeace International, and AAP**

"WSO is a non-profit national organization with a mandate to promote and protect the interests of Canadian Sikhs as well as to promote and advocate for the protection of human rights of all individuals, irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, religion or nationality. We are writing today to express our sadness at the passing of Shri Rajni Kothari. Shri Kothari was well known and respected for his work in the field of human rights, political science and public service. For the Sikh community, Shri Kothari will be best remembered for raising his voice for justice in the case of the 1984 anti-Sikh genocide. As the then President of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, he had the fortitude and courage to write a forthright and probing report on the events of November 1984 which continues to be one of the most reliable accounts of what happened. The report "Who Are the Guilty" gave a description of the massacres that took place and was a damning indictment of those politicians who orchestrated the violence. As the passing of Shri Kothari is no doubt a monumental loss to your family, we too will miss his honest and influential voice."

“Following the death of Rajni Kothari, the Indian political scientist who tirelessly defended civil liberties throughout India, Freedom House released the following statement: “The death of Rajni Kothari has deprived India one of its most eminent public intellectuals and defenders of fundamental rights,” said Robert Herman, vice president for regional programs. “Kothari was a courageous, outspoken critic of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s government after its suspension of the democratic process, and he embraced people-centered social movements as essential both to the country’s economic development and the reinvigoration of Indian democracy.”

**Freedom House, Washington**

“Rajni’s leaving us is a great loss to all of us in the MKSS. For someone like me, he has been an influence for decades and was a reference point for many things that happened in my life. We will all miss his passing away. The attack on all the values that Rajini helped establish in the public domain makes his loss more difficult to bear. He leaves yet another vacuum in the area of political thought and public action.”

**Aruna Roy, MKSS**

“We all need to be consoled on the death of a great man, a towering influence on us all. Wonder whether we will ever see the like of one who was an intellectual as well as a moral giant.”

**Uzramma, Dastkar Andhra**

“He and his political wisdom have been very much in my mind trying to make sense of the upheavals that are under way in our politics, economy and society. Today there is no one of Rajni’s stature to help us gain clarity in thought and action. It was my privilege to know him personally, to partake in his initiative of Lokayan Dialogue and to be affirmed and guided in my own efforts to become a thinking and caring activist. Rajni’s warmth and openness to all, especially those involved in struggles in the field, and his encouragement for thinking beyond academia and party political institutions, were vital contributions to the emergence of autonomous civil society movements during the 1980s. For all this and more his memory will be cherished with deep gratitude.”

**Kishore Saint, Gandhian, author, activist**



“It was a great privilege to know uncle. Though I grew up reading his books, the real person behind the books was such an affectionate and caring human being. We have so many fond memories of uncle and he told so many tales about his life to Bina. Little Vineeth used to call him 'appacha' ( grandpa). We will be organising a condolence meeting in Trivandrum.”

**John Samuel, National Centre for Advocacy Studies, UNDP and Bina Thomas, Archaeologist**

“On hearing of your father's departure, I felt a sense of personal loss as i had felt very inspired by him when i was in my 20s. I met him a few times those years and for me, who was involved in the mobilisation of the small fishers and struggling to impress upon the CPM at that time in Kerala the need to take this sector seriously, it was so stimulating and refreshing to share my experiences with your father and get his feedback. The idea of the non party political formation emerged at that time, he brought so much conceptual clarity in this debate, and in a way it gave us all a vision to work towards. I read Lokayan with interest but i lost touch with him - getting to know his sons a little better. But when we bid farewell to persons like him, it is deeply felt as there are so few of his kind.”

**Nalini Nayak, SEWA**

“My deepest sympathy and sorrow. He was a wonderful human being and understood poverty like no one else in India. I am in Lahore. Here people have expressed their sadness. In particular Dr Mubashir and Rahman Sahib. The world is fast emptying out of good people.”

**Syeda Hamid, former member Planning Commission**

“It was for me the honour of a lifetime to have once occupied the Chair bearing the name of Rajni Kothari. And it was the pleasure of a lifetime to have come to know, however slightly, that wise and wonderful man. His life was a challenge to all of us; his passing leaves a large empty space in the world.

I send my condolences to his family, and to all of you. I regret that I will not be able to get my body to the memorial; I hope you will believe that I am there in spirit.”

**C.Douglas Lummis**

“Professor Rajni Kothari, born on August 16, 1928, left this world on January 19, 2015. He was a rare academic person. In the last four decades I have witnessed many stalwarts leaving this world but not seen so many articles having been written in various languages in the mainstream media as well as in the movement space. The articles so far have primarily described him as a political scientist who, in addition to doing path-breaking work for his discipline, also contributed greatly in terms of creating enabling knowledge for the movements in India. Like the RSS which, through its collective functioning in a relatively selfless manner, helped rediscover meaning and dynamic roles for its political outfits like the Jana Sangh and BJP, Prof Rajni Kothari did perform a similar role through his various political hats such as *Lokayan* and PUCL. The difference is that the RSS does not only help its political outfits, it virtually directs and controls these through its organisational power, whereas Prof Kothari made his contribution through his moral, intellectual prowess and to some extent through his institutional support structures.

Since contemporary Indian polity claims to be fighting the negative features of *Brahminism*, probably for this reason our political class is embarrassed in acknowledging the role of intellectuals, ideas and ideologies in terms of shaping our politics and future. Kothari contributed to shaping his times in both of his incarnations. In the first phase until the mid-seventies he was the seeker of truth about Indian politics in general and democracy in particular. His second incarnation came into being thanks to the Emergency. Post-JP movement developments were a watershed in the trajectory of Prof Kothari. After the Emergency Kothari *sahab*, along with his larger peers, wanted to make an impact here and now, like an activist. Just capturing the truth in all its complexities and nuances was not enough any longer for him. The euphoria of defeating a ‘dictator’ through the ballot box was soon replaced by a series of disappointments. Retrospectively, one can see that the Janata Party under Morarji Desai was breaking some new ground but its constituents were pulling in different directions. The fuzzy understanding of the socialists regarding how to wield and sustain power for fundamental transformation contributed to the party’s drift.

Meanwhile there was undue haste in the machinations of the RSS camp to sow seeds of bitter factional battles in the party to effect decisive control over it. At the same time came Indira Gandhi’s successful intervention in the Janata Party with the help of the Soviet camp. These developments led to the breaking up of the party in July 1979. Prof Kothari, his CSDS colleagues and larger network of intellectuals did not sulk with the demise of the Janata Party. They all acted in their own ways not only to explain but were also trying to arrest the drift.

It was in this context of shattered hopes that Prof D.L. Sheth and Prof Ramashray Roy at CSDS conceived of the project which was christened by Prof Ramashray as *Lokayan* ('a place where people live' or 'movement towards the people'). They were kind enough to involve me in the pre-launch discussions in late 1979 and early 1980. Prof Giri Deshingkar and Prof Ashish Nandy also used to take active interest in these discussions. After about four-five months of preparation, the first meeting was held on May 16, 1980 in the CSDS library. I had conducted this meeting which, besides others, was attended by Prof Rajni Kothari, Ela Bhatt on behalf of SEWA, Kishore Saint on behalf of Seva Mandir, Father T.K. John, liberation theologian, and democratic socialist Jesuit Father S. Kappen. At Dhiru Bhai's insistence Prof Kothari became an active part of *Lokayan*. It was under their joint leadership that a whole lot of activist-intellectuals became part of the *Lokayan* community. Among them were Jayant Bandopadhyay, Somashekhar Reddy and Vandana Shiva from Bangalore, Manohoran from Tamilnadu, G. Narendranath, Dr Uma Shankari of Andhra Pradesh, Hemant, Nutan and Raghupati from Bihar, Achyut Yagnik and Ashok Chaudhary from Gujarat, Norma Alvares and Claude Alvares from Goa. All of them became part of the *Lokayan* team. Prof Kothari was the natural leader and public face of *Lokayan*.

*Lokayan* was almost like an open space, where change-seekers/doers from diverse backgrounds would come and use each other as sounding boards. This resulted in greater clarity and coherence among these participants. Many a time, on the sidelines new alliances or fora were conceived and launched. This exercise of creating only an intellectual interface acquired such a momentum that instead of an intellectual space, it was perceived as an activist front. This created its own challenges within the CSDS and a five-year project, started in 1980, was wound up in December 1982. The decision to wind up was taken on the sidelines of the PUCL convention in Mumbai in early August 1982 and *Lokayan* started functioning as an independent activist group with Prof Kothari and Prof D.L. Sheth as co-chairs and Vijay Pratap and Smitu Kothari as co-convenors. I have explained the genesis of *Lokayan* at length because this at the CSDS was the space where Prof Kothari, the intellectual, was reincarnated as Rajni Kothari, the activist.

There was no struggle, no space where a basic question of transformative politics was being discussed and someone from *Lokayan* network was not there. A kind of phenomenal churning among Marxist, Marxist-Leninist/Maoist/ Charu Majumdarvadi, Sarvodaya, Socialist and even newly born environmentalist groups was taking place all over the country.

Kothari *sahab's* conviviality, towering presence, and intense desire to change the world/India into a better place made him acceptable to all these streams. In my understanding, activism and stirrings have always existed in our polity

in varying degrees. But it was through the writings of Kothari *sahab*, D.L. Sheth and later Harsh Sethi and several others in the *Lokayan* Bulletins and other publications that the non-party political process acquired a distinct identity and legitimacy.

There is no easy measure to quantify the strength, legitimacy and clarity Rajni Kothari and his team imparted to the frameworks of discourse and debates on democratisation. But continuities and legacies can be traced even today. Kothari was not an individual, he himself was an institution as well as a phenomenon. To rejuvenate *Lokayan* or launch another but similar instrument or space, careful study of the phenomenon of Prof Rajni Kothari will be quite instructive.

In my humble opinion all of us put together who worked as co-workers of Prof Rajni Kothari are not able to respond to the present ideological vacuum and dead-ends in our polity. The ideological crisis witnessed by Leftists of all shades is unprecedented. In my estimation had Prof Kothari been intellectually active in the last decade of his life, the nature and contour of debates in the Left and those committed to comprehensive and participatory democracy would have been different. Today, we seem to be giving a walk-over to the BJP/RSS family in allowing them to undo the achievements of struggles of the last one hundred years after Gandhiji's return from South Africa and taking charge of national politics. The talk by the Hindu Mahasabha about installing Nathuram Godse's bust has a potent political message announcing our defeat in this battle, if not in the war. If India has to respond to the present global crisis then we need to pick-up the threads and guiding signposts left by Prof Rajni Kothari.

Much has been written about Prof Kothari's contribution in the global discourse on democracy. In the post-colonial era a majority of Northern scholars were propounding that democracy was not sustainable in the Third World countries. Prof Kothari and his large team of researcher colleagues like Prof V.B. Singh, Prof Basheeruddin Ahmed, Prof Ramashray Roy, Prof D.L. Sheth and Shankar Bose etc. decisively established that India was a vigorously functioning democracy with its own cultural and social formations actively participating and contributing to the process of party-making, electoral battles and other legitimisation process enhancing the degree of participation and the deepening of democracy. This segment of his contribution had been accomplished by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. Since 1974, when the stirrings of the JP Movement had started, Prof Kothari, Prof D.L. Sheth, Prof Ashis Nandy and others had teamed-up with several intellectuals outside the CSDS to carry out the task of defending the Nehruvian/liberal values from the onslaught of Mrs Indira Gandhi's authoritarian tendencies.

This must have been emotionally demanding for Prof Kothari himself and his team because they were the ones who had established to the world at large that the way the Congress functioned and related to other parties on the margins and movements in opposition, India's party system could be called the "the Congress system" or "one-party dominance system". The radical shades of democrats, except the CPI, were very upset with this analysis. This analysis almost de-legitimised any real oppositional, independent space for the Left and radical Gandhians and Socialists. But it was such a nuanced and matter-of-fact description of 'the Congress system' that it was not easy to put forward an alternative liberal narrative without almost justifying totalitarian radicalism. In his analysis, the system was a reflection of the existing social dynamics, power equilibrium at the grassroots and societal goals and aspirations with an accompanying level of moral energies. Any attempt for a forced radical departure would require a totalitarian social engineering. Socialists and several shades of Communists called him names, painting Kothari *sahab* and his colleagues as the system's drum-beaters. Through their role in the JP Movement, during the Emergency and later the re-launching of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), building an interface called *Lokayan* of activists across transformative ideologies, policy-planners, media activists and intellectuals on issues of 'Democracy, Development and Decentralisation' Prof Kothari and his team re-established themselves as authentic democrats independent in character. A time came when there was no shade of transformative political activists/intellectuals that did not relate to Prof Rajni Kothari and his team. The only exceptions for some initial years were the CPI-M and some marginal radical Socialist groups and individuals.

Since the JP Movement, Kothari *sahab* became almost obsessed with the idea of intervening here and now like any activist. He always had the desire—or we may even call ambition—to intervene through his intellectual pursuits while discerning the truths of our times, but after the JP Movement to 'intervene' became the primary goal. Kothari *sahab*, through his writings, identified with the JP Movement and he did not stop taking stands even after the Emergency was imposed. To continue with his campaign and avoid arrest in India, he went to the USA and campaigned vigorously against the Emergency in universities and other public fora. After the defeat of Mrs Indira Gandhi in the election of March 1977, Prof Kothari returned home and became an active member of an informal think-tank of radical liberals within the Janata Party. He played a crucial role in the Global Disarmament Conference held in India.

During the initial period of Janata rule the biggest challenge was how to engage with Left-wing extremists known as Naxalites. Prof Kothari, V.M. Tarkunde along with Socialists in the Janata Party like Surendra Mohan and George Fernandes defended the 'right to fair trial' for everyone including

Naxalites. The ruling establishment of the Congress had used the tactics of slapping cases with serious charges of loot, arson, violence and murder against those working among the poorest sections of our people. Many a time false encounters were also staged to eliminate such activists. Prof Kothari was in the forefront in defending the human rights of such activists. Under the leadership of the above persons, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) was re-launched in 1980. Prof Kothari did not patronise only the PUCL of which he was a leading figure, he was also informal advisor of a whole lot of other civil liberties and democratic rights organisations such as the People's Union for Democratic Rights, the West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh based civil-liberties organisations. The main contribution of the civil liberties movement was that issues of identity aspirations of tribals, Dalits no longer remained marginal as was the case even in the Left circles in earlier times. They became important concerns of even Left politics.

Prof Kothari combined the virtues of disciplined hard work with passion, creativity, bold and constructive thinking. At the present juncture if we engage with the issues of our times by emulating these traits, then the results will be more dramatic than what was possible during his time and that of his peers, the likes of Ramesh Thapar, B.G. Verghese, Kuldip Nayar, Raj Krishna, L.C. Jain, J.D. Sethi, Rajindar Sachar, K.G. Kannabiran, V.M. Tarkunde, Surendra Mohan, Prabhash Joshi and Nikhil Chakravartty.

To make institutions what they were during in his time required not only the above-mentioned qualities but also a pluralist notion of truth-seeking and intervention. Prof Kothari's imprint on the CSDS and *Lokayan* was very clear. In our progressive circles, it is seldom realised that it is not 'the correct line' which causes lasting epochal changes. It is the intense, honest and authentic war of ideas and approaches in an overall transparent framework, without competition and without malice, that produces great epochal breakthroughs. The CSDS and *Lokayan* were sought to be modelled in the light of these ideals. And because of Prof Rajni Kothari's leadership these institutions could create the impact that they did."

**Vijay Pratap, South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (SADED)**

"I had a rare privilege of working with Professor Rajni Kothari in the Department of Political Science in the University of Delhi for about half a decade in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As a new Reader in the Department, I was overawed by his towering intellectual presence. Yet he had a way of putting anyone in his contact at ease by his unassuming but somewhat serious demeanour partly lightened by a wry smile. One day in the commodious chamber of the Head of the Department in the Arts Faculty Main Building where he was seated on the sofa,

I dared to present to him my just published book *Split in a Predominant Party: The Indian National Congress in 1969* (1981) with the inscribed note 'To Professor Rajni Kothari for my love at first reading.' He looked up at me standing by the side and said with a chuckle: 'MP, you are right; I still get letters addressed to Miss Rajni Kothar!'

I also worked for about a year and a half as a Director (Research & Publications) in the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, when he was the Chairman and Prof T. N. Madan the Member Secretary. A new scheme that the ICSSR commissioned under their leadership was a series of authored and edited books called 'Alternatives in Development'.

He taught the main Indian politics M. A. course and chose to be in charge of the new M. Phil. programme (course work followed by a thesis) rather than the old Ph. D. (thesis only) programme, probably because the former offered a better opportunity to initiate the young political scientists into research with a more comprehensive training regimen. Since I taught Research Methodology, the more innovative compulsory centrepiece course in the programme, I voluntarily took upon myself the work of organising the joint weekly mid-term seminars led by Prof Kothari, pooling all optional courses of various substantive specialisations. All students presented their draft term papers for comments by all participants – students and various optional course teachers - with Prof Kothari moderating the discussion and offering his own comments at the end. I myself benefited from his encyclopaedic insights and knowledge reminiscent of an Aristotle and the Renaissance intellectuals. Since he seldom sat in his Departmental chamber after his lectures or seminars, I had, in course of organising his M. Phil. Seminars, the pleasure of going occasionally to meet him in his chamber in the not too far Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS, of which he was the founder Director in 1963 and from where he had come to Delhi University as a Professor on special offer in 1977). In going there, I had the added bonus of accessing the rich CSDS Library and running into the Senior Fellows there like D. L. Sheth, Asish Nandy, Ramashray Roy, B. V. Singh, and others.

One morning when I reached the Department, the office assistant, Shri Nandlal, told me that Prof Kothari had resigned from the Delhi University for full time social work. It was a bolt from the blue. I could not keep my usual composure and started crying like a child. I felt ashamed of myself (luckily there was no one other than Nand Lal around), as I felt guilty about my absence from his cremation the other day at the Lodi Estate Crematorium.

Professor Kothari became nationally and internationally recognised for his innovative and interpretative works on two structures of crucial importance in

society and polity in politics in India, i.e. the party system and caste in politics. His three initial interpretative papers highlighting the characteristically national and universal features of the post-independence Indian party system, what he called the 'Congress System,' were published in the *Economic & Political Weekly* in a series in the early 1960s and in the *Asian Survey* in 1964 and 1974. His crowning glory was his magnum opus *Politics in India* published simultaneously in India and the USA in 1970. It was a commissioned standard textbook in a series of country studies in comparative politics launched under the general editorship of Gabriel A. Almond by the Little, Brown & Company in Boston, the USA. His argument, in a nutshell, was that the party system of India, originating from the ideologically middle-of-the-road freedom movement for national independence, was different from both the two-party systems and multiparty systems in Western democracies, on the one hand, and the one-party African states, on the other. It was a veritable 'Congress System' comprising a 'party of consensus' in the Indian National Congress which transcended both the government and the opposition within its own fold dominating politics at the national as well as state levels. In other words, through its multiplicity of factions based on pragmatism, national-regional and urban-rural-divides, castes and communities, shifting coalitions of 'ministerialists' and 'dissidents', the Congress party practically internalised the effective and informal opposition for the sake of governing a consensual democratic polity. On the margins of this party system, there existed a multiple 'parties of pressure' that never really came to power during the phase of Congress dominance, but sought to influence the government by interacting with factions within the Congress which were ideologically or sociologically contiguous and congenial to them. Independently, the British Indianist W. H. Morris-Jones and Italian-American comparativist Giovanni Sartori made a more or less similar formulation about the Indian party system in that phase. The former called it 'one-party dominant system' and the latter, 'predominant party system.'

Equally notable and path-breaking was Kothari's seminal editorial Introduction to a volume of empirical studies *Caste in Indian Politics* (1970). He questioned the prevailing dichotomy between tradition and modernity that puts a cognitive blinder to proper interpretation of dialectical interaction between sociological phenomenon of caste system and democratic politics. He delineated three stages in this process of gradual democratisation of the traditional Indian society. The first phase marked the competition between the 'entrenched castes' in social hierarchy and the 'ascendant castes' in the democratic political order. Economic and political changes slowly but surely began to undermine the jajmani system and other socio-economic structures of patron-client relations. In the second stage the competition between entrenched and ascendant castes was 'now supplemented by *intra-caste* competition and the process of politicisation'(emphasis in the source itself). This process of factionalisation first began in the entrenched caste(s) and rival



factions within the dominant strata itself co-opted leaders belonging to castes down the hierarchy to strengthen their relative political power. In this stage there thus emerged more inclusive competing caste coalitions in electoral and legislative politics. This led to a 'still greater diversification of the base of politics, and with factors other than caste entering into the picture.' As in the case of the party system, in this case too similar interpretative attempts were made independently by the American political scientists Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph.

Rajni Kothari, an early academic ideologue of the Congress system, soon turned critical of it by the time of the gathering storm of the Gujarat Movement led by Morarji Desai and the Bihar Movement that spread across North India down to Karnataka under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) against creeping authoritarianism and corruption within the Congress regime under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during the turbulent 1970s. The *Politics and the People* (two volumes)(1977) and *State Against Democracy* (1988) represent the new twists and turns in his thought and interpretation. During this phase, even though he had turned critical of Indira Gandhi's Emergency and supportive of the JP Movement, this did not incline him to hold back his incisive and critical interventions as a political scientist in the political goings on. He was also disappointed with the Janata Party experiment but its role in recovery of the democratic process after the authoritarian Emergency regime was recognised.

All along, but specially after the early two books on the party system and caste in politics (both published in 1970), Kothari's writings and activities moved on a wider political canvas. These new explorations moved into two new directions: (1) quest for global equity and justice and sustainable development [ represented by his works such, for example, as *Footsteps into the Future: Diagnosis of the Present World and Design for an Alternative*, 1975; *Rethinking Development: In search of Humane Alternatives*, 1975; *Transformation & Survival: In Search of Humane World Order*, 1989] and (2) non-party political processes in NGO as well as social movement modes in post-Gandhian explorations and experimentations articulated in a series of articles in the *Seminar* and the *Economic & Political Weekly*. His increasing involvement in social activism found institutional expression in his launching the Lokayan in 1980 as a common platform for sharing experiences between academics as well as grassroots activists in the Non-Governmental Organisations and social movements from across the country.

His high profile as a social scientist is reflected in his Chairmanship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and his association with International Foundation for Development Alternatives.

All along, his prolific writings and Memoirs, *Uneasy is the Life of the Mind*

(2002) leave behind a glorious trail of academic excellence as well as genuine social and political activism in public interest.

His high profile social and political activism for the cause of democracy was recognised by making him the President of the People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL). As its President, he took the initiative of forming a National Council comprising people of diverse backgrounds and ideological persuasion. However, his desire of unifying the liberal PUCL and the leftwing People's Union of Democratic Rights (PUDR) could not materialise.

In 1985, Lokayan was awarded the Right Livelihood Award, popularly known as the alternate Nobel Prize. The citation of this prize underlined the role of the Lokayan in the 'consolidation of democracy, for exploring the possibilities and principles of coherence within the explosion of democratic assertions, for equity and people's control over natural resources, women's empowerment, cultural plurality, health and well-being for all.'

Being a quintessentially liberal, Kothari was probably more concerned about the threat to democracy from authoritarian trends in the state and the civil society. The threat to democracy from corporate capitalist sector does not seem to figure much in his writings. This may presumably be due to the fact that neither in the Indian experience nor in that of the advanced capitalist democracies in the post-World War – II period this danger has become an immediate problem to reckon with. In the post-Cold War period the gradual folding up of the welfare state and the collapse of socialist states has caused the propagation of the idea of the neoliberal state all over the world. The changing contours of relationship between democracy and capitalism is now emerging as a new problematic of political analysis in India as elsewhere. The theoretical framework of analysis is still in the process of formulation that goes beyond history and addresses itself to the newly emerging challenges and opportunities. There is no reason to believe that Kothari was and would have continued to be committed to the cause of democracy in the contemporary predicaments unfolding before us. We get a glimpse of it in his earlier writings as well. His *Rethinking Democracy* (1989), which looks at its problematique through bifocal lenses in universal as well as Indian terms, views the challenge of democracy as to 'how to relate and join the deeper drives of Indian citizens and communities to the broader challenge of socio-political transformation and emancipation; how to engage in preservation of freedom and autonomy in the face of external confrontation of both corporate and transnational varieties, and the confrontations found within the nation state such as economic divides based on class and caste, and the more threatening communal drives."

**Mahendra Prasad Singh, formerly Professor of Political Science at the University of Delhi**

“I met the late Dr. Rajni Kothari briefly in the summer of 1986 when I had travelled to India for a summer internship. Although we did not have an extended interaction, the fact that he had agreed to my request for the internship furnished not only my first direct experience of India, but more importantly and unknown to me at the time, it planted the seeds for quite a profound relationship with that country. So if nothing else, Dr. Kothari played a role, indirect and unbeknownst to him, in shaping the life of a twenty-four year old Iranian. For that I owe him thanks.

Estranged at the time from the country of my birth, I was searching unconsciously for a culture I might call home. The opportunity Dr. Kothari afforded to this young man, I now realize for the first time, was one of the steps on a path that would shape my life in important ways. From the many tributes I have been able to read, he played even more pivotal roles in many people’s lives, apart from his important social and political contributions. As a result of that summer almost thirty years ago, I was privileged to be introduced to many interesting and influential thinkers and activists in India, some of whom I remain in contact with to this day.

The story of how I ended up in Dr. Kothari’s office shows how Lokayan (and CSDS, which is where their offices were located if I recall correctly) was a part of an international network of progressive social scientists. My journey started in 1985 in the MacManus bar on 7<sup>th</sup> Ave and 19<sup>th</sup> St. in Manhattan, where those attending events at the left-leaning Brecht forum would go for refreshments. I explained to some friends that my plans to travel to Iran that summer had been dashed (I had been denied a student waiver for military service, for this was during the Iraq-Iran war). At the time I had been working for a couple of years in New York for a community based NGO on low-income housing issues. Cheryl Payer, the well-known author of a number of critical books of international political economy, suggested I write to her friends at an Indian NGO to see if I could do an internship. I did write (a real paper letter) and the response was “get yourself to India and we’ll find something for you.” In the event it was decided that I was to help on a project on indigenous water conservation. I was asked to report to Vandana Shiva and J. Bandyopadhyay in Dehradun, which I duly did after arriving at Delhi airport, finding my way to the ISBT, then onto a regular bus (really regular – no windows so I got a continuous blast of mid-May heat, wooden seats and I’m sure no shock absorbers, which in combination rattled all my bones, almost as badly as the New York subway cars in those days), arriving in the cool of evening to fresh juice from their lychee trees.

After a few days, in which I heard about the Chipko movement, I was directed back to CSDS where Dr. Kothari passed me on to (the late) Smithu Kothari and Harsh Sethi, who were then involved in a Lokayan project collecting data on rural and urban indigenous water harvesting techniques. I was to travel

almost the entire length and breadth of the country and document images and information on these traditional water management systems. The many interesting details of that trip must wait for another time. But one astonishing fact bears reporting. Lokayan, it seemed to me, had a network of local associates in every single village and town and city in India. I was given a list of locations and contacts, and from the main center where I arrived by train I would be directed to a village or town with an example of local irrigation technology worthy of study. I would be met by the local contact who would either know exactly why I was there or readily understood the task at hand. This is astonishing simply because not every state system would tolerate such an extensive alternative organizational capacity. After two months of travelling I returned to Delhi (exhausted) and wrote up my report - as I recall now - in a very hot room with huge blasting and noisy fans, which in my semi-delirium seemed to me like re-fitted jumbo jet engines.

Regarding the substance of the project-the idea that there could be sustainable alternatives that conserve water through traditional water harvesting techniques – I recall expressing tentative reservations about the feasibility of the traditional methods, in particular for large population centers. I didn't know enough really to offer a robust opinion, but I felt cautious about what I thought were somewhat unrealistic and utopian hopes. I handed the report in to Dr. Kothari - the last time I saw him. I have no idea what came of that report. Indeed I have never really thought about that project since, but I now notice from a cursory internet search that it appears to have continued to some extent. A "National People's Water Forum Declaration" in 2003 captures the objectives of the project as I remember it: "Across the country communities have created sustainable alternatives that conserve water through reforestation and water harvesting, and improved efficiency through water prudent agriculture such as organic farming and people's community efforts." (Dr. Vandana Shiva was one of the signatories.) A more recent report <https://lokayan.wordpress.com/category/environment-and-ecology/water-conservation/> describes some similar projects, and in 2010 the Planning Commission and Lokayan published a report which included a focus on traditional water harvesting techniques. These are also a clearly the legacy of those early Lokayan projects.

One final point I can't resist making. I learnt something that summer about the problems of biodiversity and forestry that I have continued to use to understand certain problems of social change. I visited a government commercial tree farm where there were large areas planted only with eucalyptus trees. These trees were favored because they had a high commercial value (popular for furniture apparently) and grew faster than many local varieties. Plantations with only one type of tree were replacing diverse indigenous types of trees. But some local residents were not happy, because they knew that in the long run these monoculture farms were

unsustainable because they degraded the soil. The over-concentration of the falling leaves with a relatively high acid content, in combination with rapid growth that drew more water from the soil than it could sustain, meant that after a few years of high cash revenue from commercial sales, the top soil would be unusable. Much better to have diverse species with more a tolerable effect on the soil, even at the cost of less revenue in the short term.

I have no idea how much of a problem this is in India today. But over the years I have returned to this experience as an analogy to illustrate the thesis linking state centralization to the atrophying of society. If the penumbra of the state grows too large, it will poison the soil from which it must nonetheless continue to derive nourishment. But the tree has forgotten its dependence on the ground out of which it has grown, so after the soil and ground water dies, so will the tree. I take it Dr. Kothari's warnings about the dangers of state centralization and confining "politics" to the formal political system were based on just this kind of understanding. So it was fitting that the project he sent me on taught me the value of political decentralization and pluralism through an understanding of the ecology of trees.

With this example in mind I cannot help comment briefly on seems to be the somewhat exaggerated animosity against "western" social theory among some parts of the Indian left. Tocqueville and Durkheim, to take just two well-known thinkers, were among the first to diagnose and warn of the dangers of the "modernization trap" I have just described - the idea that the formal procedural institutions of modern post-Enlightenment society (the tree and its foliage) exists on the basis of substantive normative presuppositions (the soil and groundwater) that itself cannot reproduce. So I am somewhat baffled by the persistent animus against "western" models or social theory in some quarters of the Indian left. I understand the intention is to challenge so-called "official" development discourse, but even that seems often to be the wrong target. Kothari's later, more realistic (some have said disillusioned) assessment of the role of decentralisation and local government institutions in a modern democratic nation-state such as India seems to me to be sensitive to just those dimensions the western thinkers I mentioned highlighted. ("The advantage of a decentralised perspective is that it is conceived within the framework of the state, but is sensitive to the plurality of civil society." *Rethinking Democracy*.) Because I have learnt as much from the problems of those eucalyptus trees as I have from those western thinkers, I don't see the dichotomy so starkly.

I do not have space to explain here why and how my experience in India played a pivotal role in my decision to return to Iran. However one point related to my summer project is relevant. From where I am today I cannot help but think that the type of "activist social scientist" that I was introduced to in CSDS that summer was fateful in several ways. I ended up trying to

reproduce that social model in Iran – albeit on somewhat different ideological and political principles from those represented by early Kothari and perhaps the CSDS more generally. I left academia in the US to pursue more social and “applied” activities in Iran. As I remind myself of Kothari’s goals for Lokayan and CSDS, ([http://www.rightlivelihood.org/lokayan\\_speech.html](http://www.rightlivelihood.org/lokayan_speech.html)), the parallels between that model and what I became involved in Iran is striking. All the objectives that Kothari pioneered and institutionalized became more or less standard approaches for the organizations with which I later became associated.

Still, the model to which I was introduced that summer was fateful because, to use the title of an article I wrote a few years ago, “Iran is not India.” The CSDS or Lokayan model was impossible to use in Iran; it was as if someone had moved the goalposts and “social activist” (an actual job description in India) became “revolutionist” as one of those social activists put it. Apart from the fact that in Iran I soon found myself way out of my depth, I got into trouble for working to promote many of the objectives that Dr. Kothari sought to advance in India. On the other hand, perhaps he would have been surprised at the extent to which his ideas of combatting so-called “western hegemony” could, in other cultural circumstances, be uncoupled from the other ideas he championed, such as the critique of an over-centralized state, or the defense of human rights and democracy and pluralism. Although Kothari’s writings do not come across as especially “ideological”, one of its features is often encountered in left-leaning intellectual currents: the fact that both what was critiqued and what was defended came as a “package.” This in my view accounts, at least in part, for the confusion among some of the Indian left when faced, for example, with certain middle eastern politicians advancing an “anti-imperialist” and “anti-American” agenda (something only a few observers such as Praful Bidwai recognized at the time).

One of Dr. Kothari’s former colleagues has written that Dr. Kothari believed “that projects should begin as pilgrimages.” For me it was other way round; one of my most important pilgrimages started with that summer project. Even though I did not get to know him on a personal level, in retrospect Dr. Kothari played a role connecting me with India and for that, belatedly, I am grateful. As we say in Persian: *Ruhesh shaad.*”

**Kian Tajbakhsh**