

REMEMBERING PRAFUL



A FAREWELL FOR PRAFUL...

Friends, there was no video livestreaming or any of that for yesterday's funeral. This is by no means a comprehensive account, and there may be much that has been inadvertently left out. It is just a brief recalling of that event, using words in the old fashioned way, even as the memories of it are still fresh in one's mind.

The electric crematorium at Lodhi Road, Delhi, is a dreary place at the best of times (and it sees mostly the worst of times). But it has this magnificent Neem tree that is really very special. Its whorls of leaves give shade under a punishing sun and seem to embody solace for the grief-stricken and the promise of better days.

It was under that tree, on a pedestal decked with red rose petals and marigolds that Praful's body was brought to rest awhile so that he could share, for the last time, a few moments with his closest friends as he had on innumerable occasions in the past. There was his family too – his sister, Meera, and two nephews, Chaitanya and Nikhil – as well as a congregation of those who valued what he stood for as a public intellectual, a communicator, and a human being. Meanwhile, playing in the background in a muted way was the classical Hindustani music that Praful loved. The powerful voices of Kumar Gandharva and Mallikarjun Mansur unleashed streams of beauty and pain, as if they

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were being struck down physically by the departure that was to take place.

Around 300 people had gathered, who formed a tight knot around Praful's figure framed by flowers, wreaths and a bowl of roses. He was wearing the shirt he often wore at parties and his face had a certain air of tranquility and peace about it that was greatly consoling for all those who looked upon it. It seemed as if he was just about to begin a conversation about governmental repression or trends in an election or why forest sinks are so valuable in an era of global warming, or any of the innumerable topics that he could engage with endlessly during his famed morning telephone conversations, or over drinks and dinner (a conversation that may have also included an exposition on the finer points of Maharastrian cuisine!)

Sonia Jabbar, a close friend of Praful's, stepped forward to read a brief statement on behalf of everyone gathered there. She began with the words, "We are stunned by Praful's tragic death... our loss is at a personal level, of course, but also, very crucially, at a much larger social and political level." She also dwelt on the one cause among the many that Praful so passionately espoused, that of Palestine, and read out a statement from the Embassy of the State of Palestine.

Praful's sister, Meera Ganorkar, was too distraught to speak but a statement was read out by her son, Chaitanya, in

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which the family thanked his friends for being like a family to him.

Among those who paid their tributes to him by placing a handful of petals at his feet were the Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, whose political progress Praful had been observing very closely and for whom he had had a storehouse of advice (including ways to control motorised traffic in the city). Kejriwal probably didn't know any of this, but he paused from a busy morning to come in and pay his respects, as did the minister of education, Manish Sisodia. Many representatives from the county's Left political spectrum were present, including Prakash Karat, Brinda Karat, M.A. Baby and D. Raja. Praful had engaged with them often and had mounted fierce critiques of their political positions on occasion. Social activists across the spectrum were also there, as were academics and representatives from the legal and cultural fraternity. Several journalists with whom Praful had interacted on a daily basis and from whom he would draw insights and pass on perspectives, were there. It's amazing how many mourners, in private conversations with us, recalled that they had "just talked to/met up with Praful". All this was a testimony to his extraordinary sociability and engagement with friends.

As silence fell, music once again filled the air as the

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politically committed cultural couple, Shamsul Islam and Neelima Sharma, who were standing by Praful's side, broke into song: "Lal jhanda lekar comrade aage badhte jayenge....Tum nahi rahe, iska gham hain par, phir bhi hum ladte jayenge" (We will raise the red flag and go forward...Even though the grief of your death is with us, we will continue the struggle...")

All too soon it was time for the last lap of this journey. His bier, carrying the banners of Palestine and the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) which he had helped to found, was carried by his comrades, men and women. Ritu Menon lent a shoulder to it, as did Sonia. Some of us followed and soon the procession found itself in the dark smoky interiors of the electric crematorium. Sorrow at the imminent parting gripped everyone gathered there, as Sheba Chhachhi and others raised revolutionary slogans in Praful's memory, including the evergreen "Inquilab Zindabad!" (Long Live Revolution) and "Lal Salaam" (Red Salute) – the origins of which he had just researched for his prospective book on the Indian Left. Amidst these voices of salutation, the body slipped into the furnace.

Praful, deeply mourned, gone far too soon.

Pamela Philipose

Praful Bidwai Has Passed Away

Praful Bidwai, an erudite and acclaimed Indian journalist and commentator, died unexpectedly in Amsterdam last night at the age of 66. He was there for the annual Fellows' Meeting of the Transnational Institute, with which he has been associated since 1988.

Praful was a passionate, insightful and prolific writer. He worked at the Times of India for many years as its most cited journalist before embarking on a freelance career that made his byline a household name across the subcontinent. His syndicated columns covered a wide range of issues from domestic to foreign policy, from the impacts of climate change to the geopolitics of war.

Praful was never afraid to challenge power or tackle thorny issues. Among his most recent writings were condemnations of rising inequality in India, and a damning assessment of the communal politics and authoritarian tendencies exhibited by the Modi regime in its first year of government. His latest book is due out in October with HarperCollins India. It deals with the challenges facing the Indian Left.

“Praful was a committed, courageous and

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articulate voice on the left,” his friend and long-term TNI Fellow, Achin Vanaik, said, “He had an extraordinary command over a vast range of subjects.”

As well as being a journalist, Praful, was an activist and founder member of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (India). His work on nuclear issues earned him the 2000 Sean McBride Peace Prize, which he shared with Achin Vanaik. In 1999, he and Achin co-authored, *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament*. He served on the Board of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in Sweden as well as the ETC (Action Group on Erosion, Technology & Concentration) Group in Canada.

In recent years, Praful issued a clarion call for India and all governments to give greater leadership and responsibility for addressing climate change. His last book, *The Politics of Climate Change and the Global Crisis: Mortgaging Our Future*, was co-published by TNI and Orient BlackSwan in 2012. In it, he demonstrated how real solutions to climate change were within grasp if only political leaders would confront vested fossil-fuel interests and act decisively.

Praful was also a scholar. He read science and

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technology, philosophy and economics at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, before pursuing development studies, political science and research into the labour movement and environmental issues. He authored and was a contributor to many books on the issues he held dear. Besides serving as a TNI Fellow, he was also a Senior Fellow at the Council for Social Development and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. He was trained in, and a connoisseur of, classical Indian music.

Fiona Dove, Director of TNI said: “We are shocked and still reeling from the death of Praful. He was a deeply loved friend, comrade and Fellow. A quintessential internationalist, an exemplary activist-scholar, he stood for peace, justice, and urgent solutions to our climate crisis. We will miss his thoughtful and insightful analysis, his well of deep knowledge, his passion, exuberance and sense of humour. We will be doing all we can to ensure that his legacy is honoured and to continue to take forward the issues he was so passionate about. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and fans in India and all over the world.

Transnational Institute, Amsterdam

June 24, 2015

Tribute to Praful Bidwai

a fearless comrade who always took
a pro-people stand

It is difficult to accept that Praful is no more. Two days back he passed away in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Now, who will spontaneously respond to right wing onslaught on the masses in these difficult times, both globally and within India?

I got to know Praful in 1974 in Mumbai in a meeting organised by the New Left group of young revolutionaries to which he belonged, when Com. Ernest Mandel, a noted Marxist economist, visited India for a lecture series. At that time, all of us known as “the New Left” believed that revolution was around the corner. Praful was intellectually versatile and spoke on any political issue with passion, data base, logic and aggression. Though he came from the science and technology stream, Praful was strongly grounded in political economy. During the 1970s, he was the star of a New Left Group called MAGOVA (English meaning of this Marathi word is Road Map). He had a convincing style of speaking. While studying at Indian Institute of Technology (Powai), Praful and his friends got influenced by international youth radicalization shaped by anti-Vietnam war struggles, liberation struggles in Africa and Latin America, youth movements in Sri Lanka. During 1975-1977, most of us met in informal study circles as the Emergency did not allow any public gatherings.

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In the millennium year, after the nuclear testing in Pokhran, along with Com. Achin Vanaik, Praful founded the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. Both of them also co-authored a book *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament* for which they were awarded the Sean McBride International Peace Prize by the International Peace Bureau, in recognition of their work challenging the development of nuclear weapons in South Asia.

In 1977, when I moved to Mumbai and got active in the women's and trade union movements, Praful had become prolific in his journalistic career and was always, always, politically correct and wrote and spoke with unassuming courage of conviction. He wrote on a wide range of strategically important issues – industrialization, human development, vested interests of sectarian forces, caste and communal conflicts, human rights, turmoil in North East India, environmental issues, climate change, nuclear policy, national politics. He was never sensational or titillating in his writings.

Praful had a thorough understanding of Indian classical music and regularly attended concerts. During 1977-1979, Praful, Gayatri Singh and me, all three of us homeless activists, used to attend several cultural events in Mumbai city together. I was staying in a working women's hostel, Gayatri and Praful had taken refuge in Sonal and Himanshu Shukla's home.

In 1982, when his mother was detected with cancer, Praful was shaken. I got to meet his sisters who came from Nagpur with his ailing mother and saw a sensitive aspect of his

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personality. In his mother's memory, he made a contribution to Medico Friends Circle in which my husband, Dr. Amar Jesani, was active.

In 1986, as a full-timer at the Women's Centre I was entrusted with the responsibility of organizing a Conference on Women, Religion and Family Laws in which delegates from 14 Asian countries had registered. Even after making several trips to various government offices in Delhi, I could not get visa clearance for most of the delegates. I was running from pillar to post to get visas for delegates from Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka without any success. When I told my difficulties to Praful, who at that time was a senior journalist with the *Times of India*, Delhi, he threw his weight around and got clearance for our delegates.

The most crucial contribution Praful made was after the 1992 riots which dealt a major blow to the secular fabric of our country. He had head-on confrontations with cultural nationalists. He started speaking from public platforms against TNC-MNC controlled economic globalisation, neo-liberalism, capitalist crisis, nuclearisation of the economy, communal tension, caste riots, violation of human rights, displacement in the name of mega development projects, so on and so forth. His columns for *Frontline* and *The Hindustan Times* created ripple effects among activists in social movements.

The last time I met him, in May 2014, was at the Press Club to discuss the book he was planning to write on the Indian Left, for which he interviewed me at length. During the interview,

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he was calm, asking questions on trade union movement, women's movement, left movement, Dalit and tribal struggles. He asked about our common friends and co-travellers in people's movements since the 1970s. Both of us were nostalgic about our revolutionary past. When I told him, "How proud we all are of your writings!" he smiled shyly.

Praful had a large fan following in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Agartala, Guwahati. Whenever he happened to be in these cities, he would invite his buddies to discuss volatile political issues with him.

The untimely passing away of Praful Bidwai has created an irreparable loss for the cause of social justice, secular humanism, human development and human rights.

Vibhuti Patel

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres

June 25, 2015

My Last Conversation with Praful

A sane voice I respected, and most importantly, a man whose politics I could trust in these terrible times, has gone. We are all much the poorer. I spoke to Praful for a long time a few weeks ago on the phone, in the last week of May. Well over an hour, I think. Though I would invariably bump into him at gatherings and events that represented our shared political impulse, this was the longest we had chatted, one-on-one, in more than a year.

He had called, out of the blue, to ask what I thought of the Misbah Qadri case – a young woman thrown out of her apartment in Mumbai because she was Muslim. The event had exercised him and he wanted to write his next column on it. He wanted my views. I said the prejudice was old; only the brazen impunity was new. What else did we expect under our present political cloud? At length I shared with him the distillate of years of my thinking about the many forms of communalism we have haboured in India over decades, if not centuries, from everyday prejudice to violent hate. He agreed. We talked about the many discussions that had taken place around an anti-discrimination law. I had been a member of the Kundu Committee (set up by the UPA as a belated follow-up to Sachar), and Praful said that is why he had called. He wanted to know about our key recommendations. He said he had tried without success to look for a soft copy of the report online. I laughed, somewhat sadly, and said the present government was unlikely to have put it online. They probably wanted it to sink without a trace. He urgently wanted a hard copy. He said he didn't want to write on the basis of just second-hand information.

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And he wanted to write more than just one piece on it. I respected the researcher in his brand of journalism, and a few days later couriered to Jangpura my last surviving copy.

Praful laughed about how he was sometimes called Mullah Bidwai by the army of on-line Hindutva trolls every time he touched on the knotty communal issue in his pieces. I said, Long Live Mullah Bidwai. Together we bemoaned the state of the nation. We cursed the bull and bullock ban in Maharashtra – after I clarified that cow had been off the table (i.e, banned) since 1976, and this latest ban had merely expanded the list of banned animals to include ‘bail’ (bullock) and ‘saand’ (bull). He didn’t know that, but said he should write about that, too! We said, one issue at a time... and promised to meet up soon for a cup of coffee or chai. We said bye.

Some days later, on May 29, he sent me his article about ghettoisation among Muslims and the need for an anti-discrimination law. I was happy. He had even managed a swipe at the bull/bullock ban. I circulated his piece to other members of the Kundu Committee, since few senior journalists, despite the battering that Muslims are getting, had bothered to really engage with the contents or the recommendations of that report. Praful had. That is why he was different and special. And I so deeply regret not following up on that promise of a shared chai.

Praful Bidwai—you and your politics were needed today more than ever. You are deeply missed.

Farah Naqvi

June 25, 2015

Remembering Praful

It would not have surprised anyone who knew Praful Bidwai, that the night he died he was surrounded by friends who, with him, represented five continents, north and south.

This gang, activist-scholars from Venezuela and South Africa, the Netherlands and Uruguay, the United States as well as his beloved India, was typical of Praful's collaborations with activists and intellectuals, protesters and writers to build global connections, global commitments, global movements. He was an internationalist who was happiest not only writing about the whole world, but doing all his work with people who lived and worked far from his New Delhi home.

How he loved the global fellowship of the Transnational Institute. In the days before his sudden and horrifying accidental death, Praful had been at the center of a set of TNI discussions that aimed at starting a global conversation to shape new definitions of popular sovereignty, and the challenges of neo-liberalism and the corporate capture of key institutions. He had presented an in-depth examination of India's Aam Aadmi Party, the anti-corruption "Common Man's Party" newly elected in Delhi, and engaged with sharp analysis and uncompromising solidarity in discussions of parallel challenges facing Podemos in Spain and the beleaguered Syriza-led government in Greece.

While Praful's journalism meant he produced daily and

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weekly columns for a host of Indian papers, his real passion was the digging in, the finding and exposing of the roots of what we see in our world – the real definition of radical, going for the roots. That's why he was so thrilled at the prospect of the imminent publication of his new book – a comprehensive interrogation of the Indian Left. Just in the last hours before his so shockingly sudden death, Praful had been cheerfully badgering each of us about ideas for broadening access to his book. He was hoping for translations in at least four Indian languages; when I asked him about an Urdu version for publication in Pakistan, his eyes lit up with excitement for what was obviously a longstanding wish. We argued about the relative value of a short primer version, for busy activists who might not be willing or have the time to read a 500-page analysis, and he grabbed our printer colleague for ideas for fonts and layout.

Praful's passions for years had been centered on opposing militarism, especially nuclear weapons, and on the ravages of climate change in the context of economic injustice and inequality. He was one of the first to write about the role of Hindu Zionism in building the dangerous Indian-Israeli alliance. He wrote books and pamphlets, he spoke across India and across the globe, he protested wherever it was needed – and he helped people in uncountable numbers to understand why all those issues were at the core of what we needed to do to change the world.

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Praful was always passionate – about food and his whisky, about poetry and gifts when he returned after long absences, but especially about using his words and his work to change the world. He worked alone day to day, but never for a moment doubted that only collective action – social movements, mobilizations, engaging with power – could accomplish that goal. He gathered friends far and wide, and held them close; with his longtime comrades Achin Vanaik and Pamela Philipose at the core, he created second and third families that embraced him as their own.

TNI was privileged that he had made us one of those families. Praful belonged to all of us, and all of us – and especially the movements with which we work and struggle – are richer and more powerful for his time among us. He planted trees that now he'll never sit under, but so many others will. Go well, Praful, we'll carry on your work inspired by your words.

Phyllis Bennis

Director, New Internationalism Project

June 25, 2015

PRAFUL BIDWAI, among the world's foremost journalists, progressive activists, and public intellectuals, died on June 23 in Amsterdam, where he was attending the annual Transnational Fellows Meeting.

It is a daunting challenge to enumerate Bidwai's accomplishments. Their common thread was using rigorous journalism to advance the cause of progressive change. In addition to the many articles he published in *The Nation*, Bidwai was a contributor to the *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *Financial Express*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, *Frontline*, and *Outlook* (in India), and *Le Monde Diplomatique* (France) and *Il Manifesto* (Italy). In recent years, his syndicated column was published in newspapers throughout India. The topics on which he wrote—in depth—were mind-boggling, and included the environment, social justice, security, nuclear energy and weaponry, disarmament, science and technology, sustainable development, and ethnic and class conflict. He brought to each one a rare combination of erudition, rigor and political engagement. The extraordinary depth and scope of his competence was evident from his student days: he graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology (Bombay), one of India's finest and most competitive universities, with a specialization in economics, philosophy, and science and technology.

Praful wrote several books, including *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament*, co-authored with his close friend, Achin Vanaik. The book and Praful's other activities promoting peace, including co-founding with Vanaik the Coalition for Disarmament and Peace (1999) earned them the Sean McBride Peace Prize from the International Peace Institute in 2000.

Among his numerous positions, Praful was a Fellow of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam one of the world's foremost

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progressive NGOs. He had also served on the Indian Council for Social Science Research, the Central Advisory Board on Education in India, and the National Book Trust.

Praful's last book, scheduled for publication in October by HarperCollins India, is *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left*. An in-depth analysis of the trajectory of the Indian Left since its birth a century ago, it seeks to promote the renaissance of the Indian Left (and, implicitly, the renaissance of the Left internationally) by helping to devise and achieve a democratic socialist alternative to neoliberalism.

Praful's extraordinary accomplishments were matched by incredible personal qualities. While utterly fearless and passionate in his commitment to promoting radical change, there wasn't the slightest shred of dogmatism in his approach. He eagerly elicited the opinions of people from the simplest to the mightiest, and whose views ranged across the political spectrum. There was nothing Praful loved more than, whisky glass in hand, engaging in intensely focused conversation on the most serious topics far into the night—leavened by frequent hearty guffaws at the craziness of this world.

Pierrot, in Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Aria da Capo", famously opines, "I love humanity; but I hate people." By contrast, although Praful hated injustice, he loved humanity and deeply loved people. He was unstintingly loyal, giving, and selfless. His friends, comrades, and readers around the world have been boundlessly enriched by his presence; we are immeasurably impoverished and saddened by his absence.

MARK KESSELMAN

June 25, 2015

(First put out on *The Nation* website)

Our Salutes to Our Dear Comrade, Praful Bidwai

Praful Bidwai, an outstanding journalist, author, commentator, anti-nuclear activist, passed away in Amsterdam on June 23. He was in the Dutch capital for the annual Transnational Institute Fellows' Meeting.

Praful's first notable work as a journalist was as a columnist for the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1972. In a career spanning four decades, he worked for several magazines and newspapers including *Business India*, *Financial Express* and *Times of India*, eventually becoming the senior editor for *TOI*. He was also a well-known author and wrote several books on a wide range of issues, including a recent book on climate change and another on the Indian Left that was due to go to print very soon.

He was staunchly anti-communal, and a strong advocate of human rights. Any meeting in support of working peoples' struggles in Delhi, and Praful was sure to be there. He was deeply interested in and passionate about the politics of development. Another issue that he was extremely interested in and concerned about was nuclear disarmament. In 1999, he wrote a very well-acclaimed book on India's nuclearisation together with Achin Vanaik,

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and the next year, founded the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace. Praful Bidwai was also an active supporter of the various peoples' struggles against uranium mining and nuclear power plants, and visited both Jaitapur and Kudankulam to express his solidarity with anti-nuclear struggles there.

Praful was an old friend of Lokayat. He came down to Pune several times at our invitation to speak on various issues, including at a seminar on "Roots of Terrorism", another on American and Israeli terrorism, and one on the dangers of nuclear energy. In recent years, we worked together with him and CNDP to build solidarity for the various anti-nuclear struggles taking place across the country.

His loss will be deeply felt by all of us at Lokayat.

Neeraj Jain, Lokayat and Socialist Party (India)

June 25, 2015

Remembering and Honoring Praful Bidwai

Our hearts were broken to learn of the sudden, untimely demise of our dear friend and colleague, Praful Bidwai. Praful was a courageous truth-teller, a fearless advocate, and a kind and funny man. Some of us were fortunate to be present at the founding conference of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) in Delhi, and to be graciously hosted by Praful in his home. He was a tremendous intellectual resource for nuclear disarmament, peace and justice and environmental movements in his home country and internationally. His articles and books informed and enriched our understanding of the complex nuclear dynamics in South Asia. Praful was a member of the Abolition 2000 Global Council – our international family. We will miss him dearly, but we will never forget him. In his honor, we look forward to renewing and strengthening our relationship with CNDP. Praful Bidwai, presente!

On behalf of the Abolition 2000 Coordinating Committee and Global Council:

Jackie Cabasso, USA
Andrew Lichterman, USA
Joseph Gerson, USA
Hiro Umebayashi, Japan
John Hallam, Australia
Alice Slater, USA
Akira Kawasaki, Japan
Lisa Clark, Italy
Kathleen Sullivan, USA

Dave Webb, UK
Dominique Lalanne, France
Aaron Tovish, Sweden
Alyn Ware, Aotearoa/New Zealand
Regina Hagen, Germany
John Burroughs, USA
Steve Leeper, Japan/USA
Rick Wayman, USA
David Krieger, USA

June 26, 2015

For Praful

For the past two days we have been in a daze of shock and disbelief Praful you were special in so many ways – and ours was a long-distance friendship – going back some three decades.

As we have been reading so many expressions of grief, tributes to the many extraordinary traits of this wonderful human being – our friend , buddy ,colleague and comrade – there is one strong conviction forming in my mind – and that is to keep alive the causes in which you were so deeply involved and for which you fought so passionately.

Just today I was reading a review of a new biography of Eqbal Ahmad, and the words used in the last para about our dear friend and sambandhi, Eqbal, could well be used to describe Praful. Praful, too, was a valued and wise member of “our clan”. I paraphrase Stuart Shaar, Eqbal Ahmad’s biographer:

“This was no usual clan. This clan has no blood linkages, no country, religion or race. Its many thousand members are spread across the continents Their only bond is a shared belief in human dignity, justice, liberty and all that is rich and precious in the human experience.”

Today it is this widespread, diverse and yet closely bound *clan* – of writers, activists, anti-nuclear campaigners, feminists, advocates for renewable energy, those of us fighting destructive development and calling attention

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to climate change; those raising voices against AFSPA and calling for sanity in Kashmir, the North-east; and friendship across our borders – especially with Pakistan; those opposing the growing communalism and fascism and right-wing terrorism – as much as neoliberal economic policies and militarism – it is we who salute you, Praful. We mourn your passing, but celebrate your life and all you meant to so many across this crazy clan.

I know you will inspire us to find a way to capture your work and ideas and take them forward in an ever more invigorated movement – maybe a green formation, which we have not really built in India – and perhaps, as you and I have so often discussed – with women taking the lead?

And just as we would unexpectedly get that call from you – wherever you and we might have been in our travels – saying, “Ramu – Lolly – read what I have sent – what do you feel – we have to do something” ...or come to this or that meeting or conference or dharna –

I will keep waiting for that call – perhaps it’s you from up there or wherever, saying – hey guys, I’m coming for a drink, keep your best scotch ready!!

We love you and miss you – but know you will never be far away ...

Lalita Ramdas / Bhaimala/ June 26, 2015

PRAFUL BIDWAI

1949 – 2015

Praful's sudden and untimely death in Amsterdam due to a totally unexpected reason has come to all of us as a shock. He was, as always, an honest and fearless writer, author, spokesperson, scientist and many other things rolled into one.

One of our leading nuclear disarmament and peace activists, who did not spare the establishment for making false and untrue claims about nuclear energy. He has been firm and clear about the dangers of nuclear power, its costs, unsafe operations, disposal of nuclear waste and other matters, throughout his life. A man of great integrity, loving and caring of humanity at large.

Whatever it be, his drive and commitment to all those important values will be sustained by the rest of us, for many years to come.

Dear, Dear Praful, we will miss you. You were a great guy. They don't make them anymore.

Adieu, my friend. We will certainly have a drink together again!

Ramu (Admiral L Ramdas)

June 26, 2015

REMEMBERING AND HONORING PRAFUL BIDWAI

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Praful Bidwai on June 24, 2015.

Praful was truly an intellectual person with warmth and a great sense of humor working tirelessly for peace and a world without nuclear weapons. We will remember his smile, eloquence, and kindness. His spirit will always be with us. We will continue our struggle with his memory in our minds working with the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP), which he cofounded.

On behalf of GENSUIKIN (Japan Congress Against A-& H-Bombs)

KOICHI KAWANO (Hibakusha from Nagasaki), Chair
June 26, 2015

Tribute to Praful Bidwai from India's Fishing Community

In Praful's untimely death, India's fishing community has lost a valuable friend and co-traveller. He was one of those rare scholar-activists who recognised and strongly believed in the power of peoples' movements in the struggle for social transformation.

We fondly remember his inspirational presence in several meetings organised by fishworkers in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, in support of the struggle against the Kudankulam and Jaitapur nuclear projects.

The fishing community and several other social movements in India are poorer for his absence. But as we continue our struggle, his spirit of justice and activism will stay with us

In solidarity

T. PETER

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

June 26, 2015

Memories of Praful

I first met Praful when I was an activist with the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Praful took a keen interest in the Narmada dam issue, and made it a point to follow it regularly over the years. Often, he would write incisive pieces on the issue, at other times, even if he did not write anything, he would like to know what was happening. He was a big support to the movement, through his writings and otherwise. Not just the Narmada struggle, but the entire movement for justice, equity and human rights will greatly miss him.

RIP, Praful.

Shripad Dharmadhikary

Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Pune (Maharashtra) &
Badwani (M.P.)

June 26, 2015

I was indeed shocked and devastated to hear of the passing away of our beloved friend, Praful Bidwai, in Amsterdam.

I have known Praful for more than two decades and was honoured to have met and had meetings with him on several key environmental and defence issues. Praful was also a prolific writer and I had great admiration for his work.

Praful's passing will certainly leave a vacuum in the social movements he was so committed to. May the Almighty bless his soul to be rested in eternal peace.

S M MOHAMED IDRIS

Chairman, Third World Network, Penang

June 26, 2015

Praful has long been an inspiration for being fearless in saying what needs to be said, on a range of issues. He could always be relied upon to support and write about peoples' struggles, and was also a strong voice for climate sanity. He will be badly missed, but also remembered with fondness and gratitude for what he gave us all.

ASHISH KOTHARI

Kalpavriksh

June 26, 2015

It is shocking and sad to hear that Praful is no more. Such an untiring fighter for peace and public interest, brilliant in analysis and articulation, unconventional and unassuming ... So many of us have benefited from his frank and clear advice on public interest-oriented work in energy. He asked Prayas not to do some things and take up some - I am afraid we have not done justice to all that he asked us to do. In these troubled times, when we need many people like Praful to stand with us, his tragic death is an unfair foul! We shall miss him and so will so many others.

Sreekumar N

Member, Prayas Energy Group

June 26, 2015

Praful's passing is a tremendous loss for those who value peace between Pakistan and India, and who oppose religious fanaticism in various manifestations. He was an upright man, clear in thought, pro-poor, anti-war, and totally secular. I valued him for his warmth as much as his commitment to the causes of peace and justice. Through his columns he reached people on both sides of the border, being critical where necessary, and vividly demonstrating how similar our problems are. Rest in peace, my friend, you did what you could to make this subcontinent a better place for all.

Pervez Hoodbhoy

Islamabad

June 25, 2015

Praful was the best of leftists, a committed, tireless fighter for the cause of justice and humanity and socialism, but it is as a dear, caring, endlessly giving friend that we think of him just now. Though one knows the political loss is incalculable, where will we find another friend like him?

So many windows have closed with him and our horizons have shrunk awfully—on an endless range of things one just called him up and he would be ready to discuss them from his endless fund of knowledge and understanding. How will it be now, without almost the daily phone calls and long, long evenings on everything under the sun? It is amazing how much our thinking converged and how much our thinking was enriched and expanded by him.

A couple of lines from Gerard Manley Hopkins that come to mind:

*Margaret, are you grieving?
About golden grove unleaving?..*

How golden was our grove with Praful in it! He taught us so much, but not how to face life in Delhi without him!

Tanika & Sumit Sarkar

June 26, 2015

In Hyderabad I am missing all of you. All this will be over on the 27th and then you will have a meeting. Frankly, I cannot still believe that he is not there. I will always remember him. Let me share a few of my memories of him with you. Everyone will talk about his activism, scholarship journalistic pieces, etc. I was struck by his child-like fascinations. I remember if he liked something, he would have it. More than a decade ago I once took him to a club in Hyderabad. We chatted for a number of hours. While drinking, he enjoyed the salty, boiled peanuts and insisted that he would carry them to Delhi. I arranged a large packet of nuts for him to take. You cannot imagine how pleased he was.

When I was in Allahabad, he would suddenly call and talk. Initially he was polite and say, "I hope I am not disturbing you, after all you are a VC." But our talks would last. Any time we met I remember him calling me gadhav (donkey) in Marathi. Without that our meeting was not complete. Once he was so disturbed by the kind of appointments that are being made in higher education that he just called me up while I was travelling to Beneras. Subsequently, when we met, I told him that there is no point in raising our blood pressure over these matters. One has to be cool even

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when we differ. His mind sometimes was like a child and his intensity and anguish against anything unfair was visible immediately.

There are not many who can appreciate the depth of Kumar Gandharva, a genius in Hindustani classical music. Praful did. I discussed Kumar ji's compositions with him. He was connected to Devas where Kumar ji stayed. I often used to wonder at his amazingly wide range of interests and capacity to articulate them through his writings.

RAJAN HARSHE

June 26, 2015

Message of Condolence on the Death of Mr. Praful Bidwai

We, in Japan Gensuikyo, are deeply shocked and saddened by the news of the sudden death of Mr. Praful Bidwai. We would like to offer our deepest condolences and sympathy to the families of the deceased and to our friends in the CNDP.

Praful stood in the forefront of the movement which grew nationwide in India against nuclearisation and for peace, triggered by the 1998 nuclear tests in the region. The birth of the CNDP in 2000, which he co-founded with Mr. Achin Vanaik, gave a great encouragement to the anti-nuclear peace movements around the world. Many of the Japanese peace workers vividly remember the important role Praful played in the 2002 World Conference against A and H Bombs held in Hiroshima, in which he represented the CNDP.

Not only as an activist, but as a prominent journalist, Praful made tremendous contribution from the theoretical front to the global anti-nuclear movement through many books and articles, confronting the pro-nuclear forces with his sharp analysis and arguments. Always with warm

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and friendly smiles on his face and having a good sense of humor, he was loved by many people.

It is our sincere hope that our friends in the CNDP will carry on Praful's will and work even harder to achieve a nuclear-free and peaceful South Asia and the world. We will long remember the appeal he made from the podium of the Hiroshima Day rally on August 6, 2002: "You inspire us to fight harder – and to win. And WE SHALL ALL WIN." Responding to his words, we pledge before you to work in solidarity with our friends in India to defend Japan's Peace Constitution and continue to strive to achieve a nuclear weapon-free, peaceful and just world.

Hiroshi Taka

Representative Director

Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs
(Gensuikyo)

June 26, 2015

REMEMBERING A CRUSADER

It is difficult to believe that Praful is no more with us. His deeply concerned and infectious enthusiasm about anything happening around us will be missed by all who had occasion to interact with him. In matters of public interest he had inexhaustible energy—writing, speaking and participating in discussions. When we met in Trivandrum last year we spoke about the emerging political scenario, when he clearly envisioned the possibility of a turn to the right in Indian politics, in the wake of the unprecedented unpopularity of the Congress and the decline of the Left. He was very keen that the Left and liberal intelligentsia devise interventions to checkmate this menace. We planned a get-together of all like-minded people in Delhi, so that a coherent plan of action could be drawn up.

Praful was a scholar- journalist or a journalist-scholar. On subjects he chose to write he acquired very deep knowledge which he combined with his remarkable analytical ability. His involvement with anti-nuclear campaigns and his uncompromising stand on communalism amply demonstrate his commitment to the interests of the nation.

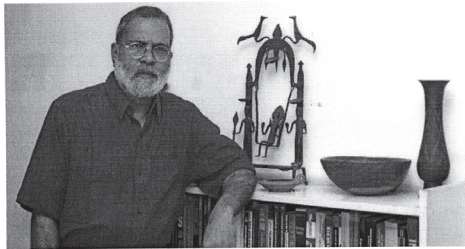
Praful was concerned about the future of the Left in India, particularly in the context of its decline during the last two decades. His last, yet unpublished, book is on the Left which he titled as *The Phoenix Moment*, is a constructive criticism of the theory and practices of the Left. He was, however, hopeful that the Left would reinvent itself through ruthless self-criticism and critical introspection.

प्रफुल्ल बिदवई: जनपक्षधर पत्रकारिता की मिसाल

JUN 27, 2015



अनिल चौधरी



Sanjay

“प्रफुल्ल बिदवई विलक्षण प्रतिभा के धनी पत्रकार, प्रवक्ता, बुद्धिजीवी और कार्यकर्ता थे। उनका अकस्मात हमारे बीच से चले जाना जनतांत्रिक, धर्मनिरपेक्ष और शांति आंदोलनों के लिए एक बड़ा झटका है। आज के विपरीत समय में अपनी बेबाक शैली, सुव्यवस्थित विश्लेषण और दुस्साहस के स्तर तक जोखिम उठाने की क्षमता के चलते वे अनेक युवा और आदर्शवादी पत्रकारों के प्रेरणास्रोत रहे। उनकी वैज्ञानिक और संपूर्ण दृष्टि तथा ऐतिहासिक बोध, उनकी विश्लेषण क्षमता का मूल मंत्र रहा। इसी ने उन्हें हमेशा खास बनाए रखा और जीवनभर उनकी लेखनी की चमक यूँ ही बनी रही।”

उनको अपने छात्र जीवन की सक्रियता और उस समय वामपंथी विमर्श धरोहर में मिला था। जीवन पर्यंत जनतांत्रिक, धर्मनिरपेक्ष, साम्यवादी, शांति एवं सद्भाव के मूल्यों से सरोकार रखने की जिस अदम्य क्षमता का परिचय प्रफुल्ल ने अपने आचरण में प्रस्तुत किया वह आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिया अनुकरणीय है। वह जिन मूल्यों में विश्वास रखते थे, उनसे उन्हें कोई डिगा नहीं पाता था। जिस मुद्दे को उन्होंने पकड़ा, उसे मरते दम तक नहीं छोड़ा। उनमें विपरीत परिस्थितियों में भी सच कहने की हिम्मत थी। वह सच कहने से कभी नहीं डरे, पीछे नहीं हटे। हजारों वाक्य ऐसे आए, जिनमें उन्होंने अपनी बौद्धिक जनपक्षधरता की साख रखी। चाहे वह जैतापुर में चल रहे परमाणु संयंत्र विरोध आंदोलन के साथ खड़े होने का मामला हो या फिर कुडनकुलम में भीषण दमन के दौर में परमाणु विरोधी आंदोलनकारियों के समर्थन में खड़े रहने का सवाल हो, वह कभी पीछे नहीं हटे। वह पहले पत्रकार थे जिन्होंने 1977 में टाइम्स ऑफ इंडिया में भाभा एटॉमिक रिसर्च सेंटर के खिलाफ लिखने का साहस किया। उन्होंने परमाणु विकरण पर जो काम किया, वह बेमिसाल है। परमाणु के मुद्दे पर इतना सघन काम करने वाले वह अकेले पत्रकार था। लेखनी में वह कभी इस बात से प्रभावित नहीं होते थे कि जो सत्ता में हैं, वह क्या सोचेंगे। किसी भी स्टोरी या किताब के लिए वह जबर्दस्त होमवर्क करते थे। मेहनत करने की उनकी आदत में कभी अंतर नहीं आया। यह उनका मजबूत पहलू था, जिसके सभी कायल थे।

REMEMBERING PRAFUL

जिंदगी में विरोधाभास तो उनके भी थे ही, जैसे हम सभी के हैं, पर वह उन पर हावी नहीं हुए। एक बात उनकी खास थी। वह खाने के बेतरह शौकीन थे। किस शहर में किस दुकान पर क्या खाना खाया जा सकता है, उसका पक्का पता प्रफुल्ल को रहता था। एक बार हम हैदराबाद से लौट रहे थे, प्रफुल्ल ने कहा, वह बिना हलीम खाए नहीं जाएंगे। हवाईजहाज के रास्ते पर हलीम की दुकान है, जिसके लिए पूरा यू-टर्न करके जाना पड़ा। हमारी फ्लाइट छूटते-छूटते बची। इसी तरह भुवनेश्वर में उन्होंने केकड़ा खाने की जिद पकड़ी और हमने उसके लिए कई होटल तलाशे। वजह, उन्हें बेहद अच्छी किस्म का केकड़ा खाना था। जिस तरह वह लिखने के लिए तगड़ा रिसर्च करते थे, खाने के लिए भी वैसी ही मेहनत करते थे। मुझे बड़ा मजेदार लगता था कि वह स्टोरी हो या खाना, सब कुछ पता न लग जाने तक बेकरार रहते थे। खाने में कैसे बना है, क्या-क्या डला है, इसकी भी तफ्तीश वैसे ही करते थे जैसे जलवायु परिवर्तन पर चल रही वार्ताओं की बारीकियों के बारे में। तह तक पहुंचना उनके व्यक्तित्व का हिस्सा था।

कथनी और करनी में अंतर न रखने और अपने विचारों को अपने दैनिक जीवन जीने का अद्भुत जीवत भी प्रफुल्ल की विशेषता थी। उसकी बैटरी वाली छोटी गाड़ी (रेवा) और उससे जुड़े तमाम प्रसंग उसका उदहारण हैं, जो मित्रों को हमेशा याद रहेंगे। प्रफुल्ल ने परमाणु विकिरण के खतरों और भारतीय परमाणु संस्थानों की लापरवाही का खुलासा 70 के दशक में ही शुरू किया था और उसका नाम आज 21वीं सदी में भी हिंदुस्तान की सबसे सशक्त परमाणु विरोधी आवाज के रूप में अपनी पहचान बनाए हुए है। कर्मठता, प्रतिबद्धता और वैचारिक ईमानदारी की दृष्टि से प्रफुल्ल हम सब मित्रों के लिए अनुकरणीय हैं।

जीवन यूं भी विरोधाभासों का पुलिंदा होता है और उनसे निपटते रहना ही जिंदगी। प्रफुल्ल की जिंदगी भी इससे अछूती न थी। अपने विचारों और लेखन में अत्यंत व्यवस्थित रहने वाला यह व्यक्ति निजी जीवन में उतना ही अराजक और लापरवाह था। उनके इस लक्षण ने ही शायद उनके सैकड़ों दोस्त और खैरखवाह बनाए जो शायद कभी उसकी याद से छुटकारा नहीं पा सकेंगे। हम सब उनकी गिरफ्त में हैं और यूं ही रहेंगे।

(लेखक परमाणु निरस्त्रीकरण और शांति के लिए गठबंधन (सीएनडीपी) से संबद्ध हैं।)

Anil Choudhury

June 27, 2015

We, in Focus on the Global South, are deeply saddened by the unexpected demise of a dear friend and committed activist, Praful Bidwai. He was a close friend of Focus and was always part of our campaigns and programmes on challenging the development paradigm of the State, militarisation and nuclear build-up. We shared his views on communalism, nuclear disarmament and climate change, and often allied with him in raising the issue **of peace in South Asia**, climate justice and environmental sustainability. With Praful's untimely passing, we have lost a courageous and indefatigable voice during a time it is most required.

Focus Team

June 29, 2015

GOOD AND STRONG

Remembering Praful Bidwai

To think, articulate, convince, argue and write about topics as wide and relevant as secularism, climate change, nuclear disarmament, national politics, ecological justice and people's movements is not an easy task for a single human mind. More amazing would be the gentle and nonviolent way in which the most vehement and strong arguments would be framed and presented in a characteristic intense style. To coin pathbreaking and thought-provoking slogans like **Ecological Solidarity**, **Media Jingoism**, **No More Ghettos**, to portray topics that troubled the mind like climate change, green energy, discrimination and the Nepal disaster within a span of 15 days (June 1 – June 15 , 2015) and then to stop living on June 23...

This and much more was Praful Bidwai—journalist par excellence, an organic intellectual (in John Samuel's words), an unfailing friend and comrade of people's movements across the country, and above all, a fun-loving human being. Having seen his handsome face with a generous beard in columns, especially in *Frontline*, for years, it was a special moment for me to encounter Praful in Thiruvananthapuram Press Club for a meeting

organized by Kerala Independent Fishworker's Forum in May 2010. He was there to discuss and present his report *An India that Can Say Yes- A Climate-Responsible Development Agenda for Copenhagen and Beyond*. It was amazing how he presented the most complex of concepts in a simple, easy style. It was on that day that I realized Praful's uncanny capacity to understand the pulse of the other person as he wrote in the book he gave me "in ecological solidarity". That seems to me the best and most perfect solidarity that needs to be nurtured and developed among human beings and with the Earth, as we go full throttle on this path called development.

Yes, Praful was always ready to be in solidarity with genuine and deep-rooted fights and struggles for justice. More than alliances and negotiations, he was willing to form friendships, maintain bonds, associate and support with the best he could offer, and bring all who were close to him in the loop – this capacity to be inclusive made friendship with this smiling man so easy and open. This may be why Milton of Idinthakarai village in Kudankulam remarked when he heard of the sudden demise "We have lost someone who would come rushing whenever the need arose." True, Praful always created the feeling that he would come rushing to your aid, listen to your cause and take it up with the same zeal as you!

REMEMBERING PRAFUL

The way in which Praful was able to extract certain concepts and opinions about crucial issues from the innermost recesses of your mind made each conversation with him challenging and liberating. Questions about the present status of Left parties and movements, their stance, especially on environmental struggles in Kerala, demanded honest and open sharing of concerns and anxieties. This makes waiting for the book that is yet to be published special but also painful. (*The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left* to be released in October 2015.)

It was indeed a long-forgotten era that was revealed during the memorial meeting organised by Praful's old friend of the 1980s—V.Sasikumar, who described Praful's efforts in writing about the Silent Valley issue in *Times of India* by collecting information from friends in Kerala. The sharing by veteran journalist, B.R.P.Bhaskar, about the special genre that Praful represented through his style of meticulous research and seeking of information, made the gap that his passing away creates a permanent one. Thoughts that Gouridasan Nair expressed about occasional phone calls from Praful, with pertinent questions about the Left and about movements were a reflection of the concerns prominent in his mind. The fact that Praful noted the

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marginal value that the Left placed on environmental issues in the development dialogue was pointed out by Gouridasan Nair. The organic intellectual that Praful was with his ability to create an open space, was what John Samuel reminisced about against the backdrop of three decades of friendship. Jyothi Krishnan shared her short but deeply etched experience of travelling with Praful to Kudankulam in 2012 with her family, his intense convictions about the need to shun nuclear energy, his attachment to her children and so on.

If you can judge a person best by his/her attitude to children, it needs little to conclude that Praful had a sensitive, soft heart. He was so indulgent and appreciative of children that it took him very little time to notice them, acknowledge them and vibe with them. His indulgence came in the form of ice creams and food, in laughing and enjoying their small pranks and antics, and most uniquely, paying attention to them even in the middle of a serious discussion. He would greet children with a twinkle in his eyes and say, "How adorable." The day we had our condolence meeting on a rain-washed evening in Thiruvananthapuram, 10 year old Arunima came up and asked, "Did Praful Uncle have children?" On hearing No, she said "Am relieved to hear that. They would have been heartbroken otherwise." This alone

REMEMBERING PRAFUL

seemed a fitting tribute to the dear golden heart that pulsed for 65 years in his body.

It is with grief and a deep sense of loss that I quote from the poem “Turn of the Century” (Wisława Szymborska):

*God was at last to believe in man
good and strong
but good and strong
are still two different people*

In the case of Praful, good and strong have been always the same person. This is why he remained unflinching in his convictions, uncompromising in his style of writing, humane in his behaviour and consistent in his involvement. This could be why he did not achieve much, become a member of committees and reap awards and accolades. It is indeed a privilege and honour to have known a good and strong one like Praful. This increases the intensity of the missing.

Anitha S. – in conversation with S.P. Udayakumar, Milton, Jyothi Krishnan, Santhi S., Gokul, V.B, and members of the M.B.S. Youth Choir who sang two songs against war, for disarmament and for someone who left the world with his tasks half done.

June 30, 2015

Praful's death has created an enormous void in my life and in the lives of my family. I've been trying to imagine Delhi without Praful, life without Praful. And I can't.

There was to begin with the sheer length of our friendship, around twenty-five years. And time spent with Praful was unusually fulfilling, because Praful's heart was as big as his intellect.

Praful engaged so many parts of my life—work, politics and family. I spent more time talking to him than virtually anyone else about my book on Hindu nationalism. I would have felt self-conscious asking many people the questions I raised with Praful, but he was never patronizing or impatient and I always came away from these conversations feeling smarter and better informed. When we spoke about his book on the Indian Left, he was in turn ready to ask questions, even if they seemed naïve, and to grapple out loud with his uncertainties.

Praful's political passion was contagious. In December 1992, when he was a visiting scholar at Amherst College, Hindu nationalists destroyed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Praful convinced us that we had to take to the streets in protest. So a motley group of us wound our way through in the town commons, holding placards, shouting slogans and bringing traffic to a halt. Praful was an internationalist who was not limited by geographic boundaries and Amherst was as good a place as any other to launch this protest.

I was taken by Praful's charisma, courage and forcefulness.

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But I was equally taken by his modesty, unpretentiousness and self-restraint. When Praful was in a room full of people and the conversation was becoming increasingly heated, he was as apt to sit back and listen as to hold forth. He enjoyed an argument in which he learned something new even more than one in which he proved to be right. Maybe that's one of the reasons that Praful had many friends who were women, and strong women at that. Praful wasn't threatened by strong women; he seemed to admire them. Nor for that matter was he threatened by male friends. Praful didn't have to talk about equality, internationalism, and feminism. Those were the values he embodied, lived and breathed.

Praful adored his friends and he wanted his friends to be close to one another. He would routinely fill me in on news of Mushir and Sumit when they were unwell and ask me if I had been in touch with them. Not only were his friends his family but his friends' families also became his friends. I remember his telling me how he had a completely independent friendship with Ratna from his friendship with her parents, Ritu and Poge. And he developed completely independent friendships with my mother, my sister Rekha, my aunt Meher, my husband Mark and my sons, Ishan and Javed. I hope Praful knew how much his friends adored him. I wish he could see the way they are commemorating and mourning him and celebrating his extraordinary heart, mind and soul.

Amrita Basu

Amherst College, June 30, 2015

How ironic, Praful, that you gave me Atul Gawande' book *On Being Mortal*, just weeks before you died. Here I am, mourning your mortality when I thought you were preparing me for my own. I always loved you as a friend of the children and welcomed your presence in our midst. But in recent years, I came to see you as my own friend. I was so touched that you would come and visit me even when the children weren't in Delhi and that we would talk at such length. I hope you have a sense of the great love, admiration and respect for you that is pouring in from all quarters. Love you and miss you.

Rasil Basu

Ekatra

June 30, 2015

Farewell, Praful—dear friend, brilliant journalist and role model, uncompromising truth-seeker and advocate. Your passing leaves a crater-size gulf, but your legacy lives on in the countless lives you touched and lessons you taught, with inimitable humor, wisdom and warmth.

Rekha Basu

Des Moines Register

July 1, 2015

The elements so mixed in him...

AS I knew him, several mutually aloof elements blended in Praful Bidwai. The first, quite likely by design, was reflected in the music that wafted over the electric crematorium at his studiously dignified, non-religious funeral on Saturday. ‘Kituwe gaye logwa jin sang sukh payo’. The opening lines of Mallikarjun Mansur’s searing Yamani Bilawal revealed a yearning for the beautiful people who had gone away. The antara wove a quicker phrase, speaking of cordiality in discussions: ‘Jin me sajile din me beet gayo baat, krodh nahi aawe’. As Praful would have liked, I cross-checked the composition with Priyadarshini Kulkarni, a learned Pune-based exponent of Mansur’s Jaipur-Atrauli style of singing, whose fan my friend was.

While a trained singer himself, Praful’s love of classical music could also work against any friend who dropped him home after a late night outing. The floorboard of my tiny Korean car is pockmarked with the stamping of the Marathi-speaking Brahmin’s faded shoes. On our way back from one of the periodic intellectual soirées that would inevitably turn into happy hours, the angst in Ali Akbar Khan’s Durga set off an uncontrolled bout of foot-stamping. His demeanour on such occasions could pass for *haal* or trance associated with qawwali listeners moved by the *sama* or aura of the rhythm.

The legendary sarod player had recorded the pentatonic Durga on Sept 3, 1963 in Lucknow. That’s the kind of detail I could expect to get about music only from Praful

Bidwai, even if the audio CD happened to belong to me. I checked, and he was right. One day Kesarbai's Nat Kamod caused even deeper dents on the fragile floorboard.

I must state here that Praful's own trademark jalopy was an even tinier contraption. He was a practising environmentalist, a fact he underscored by driving what could be confused for a battery-operated dinky toy. Anyone who dared to hitch a night ride, with him in the driver's seat, would find it a challenge to remain an unflinching atheist, as Praful was, when he passed away in Amsterdam last week. He was 66.

Marxism works differently on its diverse range of supplicants. It has the propensity to make some followers very dry and humourless, a quality often intensified by a proselytising zeal that practitioners exude, not without a textbook-stern look. Praful Bidwai, to my mind, was just the opposite, a man of easy manners but with an exacting moral compass. He was a Marxist with a tremendous capacity for self-criticism, which blended with his ability to laugh (and rage) at an ideological setback. It was thus that he could be a picky music connoisseur and also a generously eclectic leftist ideologue.

A slice of the latter talent should be on display in Praful Bidwai's forthcoming book on the history of India's Left. His close associate on the project, Harsh Kapoor, says the book promises (or threatens) to be an unsparing critique of all that has gone wrong with the country's communist movements. Praful finished the manuscript in time to keep an academic appointment in Amsterdam, and

unwittingly, to a sudden death at a dinner with friends.

The departure was terribly timed because those he worked and struggled for desperately need him now. Only in October last year Prof Romila Thapar was lamenting the dwindling tribe of public intellectuals in the country. Indeed, in recent days, many who could have been a buffer against India's steady rightward slide chose instead to be absorbed by the system they promised to confront. Praful Bidwai and his close comrades stood their ground. His co-author in an early book against India's nuclear weapons strategy and lifelong friend, Achin Vanaik, helped set up the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP). Praful's job in the close-knit group was to disseminate the message in simple prose in his columns. Among his target audience was Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, someone Praful valued and also critiqued in a constructive way.

Shunned by the mainstream media, a fate that befell the best of Indian journalists in India's 'growth story', Praful often had to produce up to four well-researched articles in a week. This was necessary to keep his means of livelihood and ideological objectives from faltering. The range of subjects on which he could hold forth with amazing insight was stupendous. Peasants, workers, capitalism, environment and gender issues were staple fare. Explaining religious fanaticism and its alliance with economic authoritarianism was his forte.

Praful kept a close watch on the Middle East, always engaging sympathetically with the Palestinians against

Israel's occupation of their homeland. He excelled as a credible advocate for peace on the India-Pakistan circuit. Many admirers and followers from across the border lauded his reasoned critique of hawks on both sides. It was possibly his last engagement as a conscientious public intellectual when he drafted a biting criticism of jingoists in the Indian administration who sought to commandeer an upsurge in India's volatile northeast to point fingers at Pakistan and China.

“We are shocked at the level of jingoism being peddled by the ministers of the Modi government, members of the ruling BJP and sections of the mainstream media in India over the recent action by the Indian army in Manipur,” Praful wrote for the CNDP.

“While several questions are being raised and newer facts are emerging as the details still unfold — whether or not it was a cross-border case of hot-pursuit, whether it was a retaliatory or a pre-emptive action etc, the manner in which this action is being linked to a general justification of such hot pursuit vis-à-vis Pakistan and China is deplorable and dangerous.”

There are not too many people left who can tap their feet to riveting music while drafting a cogent strategy to defeat fascism, as Praful Bidwai could do with flair.

Javed Naqvi

Published in *Dawn*, June 30th, 2015.

A Tribute

In his relentless pursuit, as an activist, on issues of peace, global justice, human rights and environmental protection during the last several years, Praful Bidwai became a leading light to all those among civil society who cared for upholding human dignity and democratic traditions. His voice lent support and strength to thousands of voiceless people who campaigned against senseless industrial projects that helped corporates to profiteer at their expense. In particular, I remember his wholehearted support to all those who campaigned against the numerous nuclear power projects undertaken by the government, which were highly expensive, unsafe and disruptive of the the lives of people.

During the last few years, globally, there has been an unprecedented upsurge in nuclear proliferation, driven largely by corporate interests. This in turn has triggered a disturbing escalation in conflict and tension in many regions of the world. In this context, the leading role played by Praful in the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace was truly exemplary.

I had the honour and privilege of working closely with Praful as a co-member of the Review and Advisory Committee (RAC) set up by Prayas, a reputed Pune-based NGO. During the last few years, I had kept in close touch with him, often seeking his advice and sharing with him my own concerns about a range of issues revolving around government's policies. His insights were always incisive and his views invaluable.

His untimely demise is a great loss to civil society.

E A S Sarma

Former Union Power Secretary

July 1, 2015

A Tribute to Praful Bidwai

The **Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation** mourns the passing away of a public intellectual, whose life added salt to the earth. We were privileged to have Praful Bidwai for more than a decade as a member of the Foundation's Board, in which he so eloquently represented global civil society.

His engagement in the Foundation's "What Next" project was unique. His chapters in all three volumes of the project published in the "Development Dialogue" series were evidence of his competence and advocacy role. He promoted issues of environmental awareness and questioned the basis of the dominant developmental paradigms and discourse. He thereby added tremendous value to creating a wider awareness of current challenges our world is facing.

With Praful we will miss a person, who was aptly characterized by Dag Hammarskjöld in the following words: "The intensity of a man's faith in life may be gauged by his readiness to say yes to the past *and* yes to the future". He lived up to another observation by the second Secretary-General of the United Nations: "It is when we all play safe that we create a world of the utmost insecurity. It is when we all play safe that fatality will lead us to our doom. It is 'in the dark shade of courage' alone, that the spell can be broken."

As courageous public intellectual Praful Bidwai advocated the true meaning and values of humanity, international solidarity and social justice. As a board member of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation he represented civil society at its best. We bemoan the loss of a global citizen. His legacy lives on in our own continued efforts to promote the values, which both, Dag Hammarskjöld and Praful Bidwai shared and lived for.

Tribute to Praful

I met Praful in the early 1980s when my wife Amrita and I were on sabbatical leave. When I wrote an article comparing the French and Indian bureaucracies, Patwant Singh, Amrita's uncle, encouraged me to publish it in an Indian newspaper. Although Patwant didn't know Praful personally, he suggested that I contact him, at that time a Senior Editor at *The Times of India*, because he considered Praful among the most creative and courageous journalists in India. (Patwant and Praful later became good friends, and Praful was a frequent guest at Patwant's lively dinner parties.) When I called Praful at the *Times* to ask about the possibility of publishing my article, he immediately invited me to his office. He was quite cool at first—why shouldn't he be when a stranger, and an American at that, wanted to meet him? However, he was thoroughly professional, accepted my article for publication, and shepherded it into print. It was only after I wrote a second op ed for the *Times*—which critiqued French President François Mitterrand's right turn—and then a third, where I punctured myths about American democracy, that Praful began to regard me as a comrade. Our relationship steadily developed into a lifelong and intense friendship—one brutally cut short by Praful's tragic death.

I was struck from the beginning by how uncompromising Praful was when critiquing someone's position—yet how respectful he was in his criticism.

The near-universal esteem for Praful was evident—in humorous fashion—when we had lunch last January at the Delhi

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Golf Club, one of our last meetings. Although neither of us belonged to the club, I assumed that we could sign in with my father-in-law's membership card. Retribution for this misjudgment swiftly arrived. When a staff member requested proof of club membership and learned that my father-in-law wasn't accompanying us, he grimly ordered us to leave forthwith. Nor was he swayed by Praful's plea that we be allowed a few minutes to dispatch our whisky. Just as Praful was bolting down his drink and we were on the verge of being unceremoniously ejected, someone who witnessed the fiasco and did not know Praful—but who recognized who he was—came to our rescue and “adopted” us as his guests. There followed a particularly lively lunch, punctuated by many guffaws and celebratory toasts to our mutual good health. Unfortunately, the toasts apparently fell on deaf ears...

I will forever cherish the memory of Praful bombarding me for suggestions to revise an early draft of his newest book *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the India Left*. In reviewing the manuscript, I was reminded on every page of Praful's erudition, incisive prose, and fierce commitment to social justice.

I am reminded of JFK's laconic, “Who ever said life is fair?” It certainly hasn't been fair to Praful—or to the causes he supported, or to his myriad friends, who have been deprived of many more years of Praful's precious friendship.

Mark Kesselman

Columbia University

June 25, 2015

Praful Bidwai: the giant intellect riding a small car

The news of Praful Bidwai's sudden passing away comes as a shattering shock not only to his friends but to all forces of peace and freedom in India. He was at the peak of his writing career, presenting challenging perspectives on most critical issues of our time, influencing public discourse in India, advancing the cause of democratic rights.

My last meeting with Praful was at a dinner for contributors to the volume *Building a Just World : Essays in Honour of Muchkund Dubey* at the India International Centre on 17 May. This volume carries his important contribution on the course of global negotiations on climate change, on which subject his book had already made a major impact.

At the Council for Social Development when Praful Bidwai joined as the first full-time Durgabai Deshmukh Chair we all were greatly excited. He added not only excellent intellectual company to the colleagues, he made the discussions at the Social Development Forum lively. He took the initiative to organize a number of events on environment issues. He completed his much-awaited study of the Left in India during his tenure at CSD and submitted his report. I had the privilege to discuss many

of his ideas whenever he wished to get my reactions. We both shared our concerns about the issues that had weakened the Left, especially the mode of integrating class perspective with social factors such as caste, gender, religion, tribe, as well as the practice of democracy. He was finalizing the manuscript for publication at the time of his sad demise. Hopefully, it will come out soon and rekindle our hopes for renewing the Left to emerge as a prominent force to realize the rights of the oppressed people of India.

Praful and I worked together in the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy from its inception. At the Lahore Convention in 1996 he was the star attraction, mobilizing Pakistani friends for nuclear disarmament and consolidating the united efforts of journalists in the subcontinent for human rights and press freedom. Till the very end he was an asset to the PIPFPD, and friends in both countries will miss him very much.

Praful drove a small electric car to prove that he practiced what he preached. Not only will the famous journalist with a sharp pen in his columns be missed, but a wonderful human being, a delightful conversationalist and a brilliant intellectual will be remembered forever.

Manoranjan Mohanty
Council for Social Development

Priscilla Weaver
Susan Medeiros

Teunje Vosters.

Milde van der Pas
Lydia Ferrnanda Fonero
Bud Berman

Amira Armeluta

Tom Birkman

Michelle v. Lanschoff

Nicki Buxton

Sebastian

Tessa

Diana Aquino

Susan George

Jana Jare

Janet Chavez

Martin Jelsma

Sstoko Kishimoto

Sol Trumbo Vela

Jenny Franco

Fons Broersen

Conrado Berman

Tim Raff

Dearest Praful

Sending you home
w/ great sadness but
with a heart full of
love and gratitude
and admiration for
the warm - kind -
sharp - humble
person you are.

You remain part of
the TNI family
and stay w/ our
hearts and spirit.
We carry on the
struggle.

PRAFUL BIDWAI

1949 – 2015

It will be hard to reconcile the world of Indian journalism without Praful Bidwai. For over forty years he provided a critical, progressive and rigorously analytical perspective on major environmental, political economy, development and foreign policy issues in the country, through his syndicated columns across India and South Asia.

Bidwai's formidable intelligence was accompanied by a passionate politics. As an anti-nuclear activist, he was the first reporter to undertake an in-depth investigation into India's atomic research programme. His series of articles, published in *The Times of India* in the 1980s, marked a turning point in science reporting.

Long before the term became fashionable, Bidwai was an activist-journalist. He was an important participant in a range of social movements, because he understood that raising his voice against injustice was as necessary on the streets as it was in print. As a founder member of the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (1999), he crusaded against

nuclear proliferation, including its civil and “peaceful” uses, with the same commitment that he brought to his journalism.

There was no dearth of causes for this man of conscience to take up — climate change; nuclear disarmament; the morally indefensible occupation of Palestine; cross-border alliances for peace in South Asia. And on home ground, his uncompromising stand against the deeply divisive saffron politics of the Bharatiya Janata Party; and the steady erosion of secular, democratic values. He spared neither Right nor Left, arguing persuasively for introspection by the latter in order to reclaim its political space in the country.

His published books, *Politics of Climate Change and the Global Crisis*, and *South Asia on a Short Fuse: Nuclear Politics and the Future of Global Disarmament* (co-authored with Achin Vanaik) amplified his deep disquiet with both issues. His latest work, *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left*, will now be published posthumously.

But Bidwai’s friends recall his other abiding interests: a love of Indian classical music and his keen enjoyment of it; an unexpected enthusiasm for

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bird-watching; an evident pleasure in good food, in discovering a new restaurant; his ability to reach out to a huge variety of people across generations. His intimate association with alcohol was, of course, well known: pink gins over weekend lunches at the Press Club or the India International Centre in Delhi, whisky in the evening with friends (and sometimes foes), when he was at his expansive, argumentative best.

He died in what was his preferred setting – at a restaurant, in the company of friends and colleagues whose politics he shared and for whom he had an affectionate regard.

Ritu Menon

June 26, 2015

Wild Swans at Coole

W.B. YEATS

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine-and-fifty Swans.
The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.
I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trode with a lighter tread.
Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.
But now they drift on the still water,
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away?