

## Memoir

### Prof. CDN: A Personal Reminiscence

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At the outset I am most deeply grateful to Dr. Sudheer Hajela for wishing to bring out a Special Issue of *Dialogue* to commemorate the Centenary Year of my father Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah, fondly known as CDN to his vast circle of friends, students, colleagues and admirers. Dr. Hajela could not have chosen a more befitting way of honouring Prof. CDN's memory than by inviting a host of distinguished scholars (some of them his own students) to write about him, about his achievements as a scholar/teacher if not discuss his contribution towards creating a healthy, vibrant critical climate in the country. After all Prof. CDN strongly believed in the concept of *samvada*, "dialogue" which was most imperative in creating "a current of fresh and living ideas" so as to keep one's intellectual stimulus alive. In fact, it was with this view of fostering a spirit of collaboration among like-minded people, notably intellectuals, that Dhvanyaloka, his dream child was born. Such was his profound concern for the life of the mind, he would often keep invoking Macaulay's "imperishable empire of ideas" with admiration. Small wonder if he looked upon his Research Centre and the Journal he founded in 1952, *The Literary Criterion* as his two eyes.

Born in a poor family in a humble village, Prof. CDN yet rose to attain international fame and become a legend in his own life-time. His very name spelt magic to his ardent admirers. For his students with whom he developed inordinately touching bonds, there was only one CDN, the like of whom they couldn't meet elsewhere. His zest, dynamism, an all-consuming passion for work and absolute commitment to a cause made him a role model, worthy of emulation in his pupils' eyes.

He would, in a deeply reflective mood remark he did not know what "self-realization" was, as saints perhaps interpret it in a metaphysical sense, but as far as *he* was concerned, it meant a complete *realization* of one's own inherent potential and innate gifts. This perhaps was like seeing God face to face. It called for a profound allegiance to one's inner calling, an unconditional surrender to one's vocation. His fierce commitment to a cause would often remind me of Dante's saying: "He who draws a line must be *It*".

My father infected me with this *passion*, an ardent passion for whatever I was doing, be it reading, writing, teaching, no less than housekeeping or cooking! This taught me a holistic view of things and instilled in me a true sense of values. Of the many valuable lessons he imparted to me, however, the one I cherish most is the way he trained my *sensibility* and sensitized me to a million things in life, big and small. How somebody responded to art, literature, music or even anything in day-to-day life: people, events, situations -- all was vital to him. How one greeted or spoke; how one even sat or stood or walked or what *tone* of voice one

adopted in one's conversation, all mattered to him most, for what he expected was grace and refinement in speech and manners.

Not for nothing did Alexander the Great remark: "If one is indebted to one's father for *living*, one is indebted to one's teacher for living *well*". As Prof. CDN was my father as well as my teacher, I am indebted to him for *both*. His unconditional support and encouragement have stood me in good stead even today, urging me forever to aspire high and find joy and fulfilment in the finer things of life. He was and still is a perennial fountain of inspiration to me.

For all his learning and scholarship which sat lightly on him, he was intensely warm, humane, generous and compassionate, full of consideration and respect for the "Other"! "All inclusiveness is culture and all exclusiveness is want of culture", he would often quote Jawaharlal Nehru with great approval. Yet in his quest for achieving excellence, he set up high standards and was always uncompromising. Profuse and full-throated as he was in his compliments while acknowledging genuine merit, he was also unsparing in his criticism. But at the same time he would try to tone down the severity of his judgments with an eye for civility and urbanity. How he chose his words and phrases was an eye-opener for me. Even an ordinary post-card he wrote either to make a casual enquiry or convey a message would pulsate with warm feeling and strike the reader with the originality of his phrasing. So much so his letters have turned out to be precious souvenirs which many of his students have found worth preserving. I have treasured some.

It is an understatement to say what a blessing it has been to be born of such a father who in spite of being a celebrity possessed an incredible degree of humility. To cite just one instance, he once happened to send a book to the Principal of my College with a brief note carrying his signature at the end, below which he wrote, "Ragini's father" as if he needed to introduce himself thus! It moved me to my depths, leaving me speechless. A word of appreciation from *him* therefore for any work I did would mean the world to me -- in fact, the *ultimate* compliment! Hence, not to disappoint him, but to come up to his expectations became my cherished goal.

I can only bow in gratitude to him for all that he has done to make a perceptive *difference* to my life. While it also entails a tremendous responsibility to be born of such an idealistic father who not only dreamt big but had the courage to make it *real*, I realize how right Goethe was in observing:

What from your father's heritage is lent,

Earn it anew to really possess it.

Finally, I thank Dr. Hajela for bestowing on me this privilege of paying my tributes to a father who was extraordinary in many ways. I feel honoured.