

IN MEMORIAM: S. TIWARI
No rest for a true karma yogi

by Asad Latif
For The Straits Times, 02 Aug 2010



Mr Tiwari was a devout Hindu, which is to say that he saw no reason to defend his religion by putting down others. He was a karma yogi, one who seeks fulfilment in action without hankering after the fruits of action. -- ST FILE PHOTO

A LARGE number of the mourners at Mr Sivakant Tiwari's funeral last Monday were not Indians. This was natural. The Legal Service veteran had touched many lives during his long years of service in multiracial Singapore, not least at the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) but also in community work and as a senior researcher at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

His former and current colleagues, and fellow community workers, were among those who visited the hospital where he was warded. Many more turned up as the news spread in the few hours between his death on the morning of July 26 and his funeral. He was 64.

It was a truly multiracial crowd of mourners. Some of the loudest wails came from Chinese women.

What was special about this was that Mr Tiwari was in a very real sense an Indian. Indeed, he was very traditional in his Indianness. Although he was thoroughly Singaporean, his habits of the heart remained Indian. Once, I asked him whom he had at home. They were, he said, his mata-ji (mother, 'ji' being an honorific), his wife, himself, and their children. He had

inherited, from a deeply felt and cherished ancestry, the habit of naming the life-giver, and not the current breadwinner, as the head of the family.

However, it was as a Singaporean that Tiwari-ji, as I called him, enlarged the meaning of being Indian. He loved his mother; the language of his love was his mother tongue, Hindi. His efforts - helped by good friends such as senior lawyer Shrinivas Rai - helped make Hindi one of the South Asian languages that children here could study as their mother tongue.

Without encroaching into Tamil's constitutional preserve as an official language, Hindi - along with Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu - enlarged the cultural space enjoyed by the other South Asian languages in Singapore. As a Bengali, I am grateful for his efforts. I am even more grateful that he remained a friend in spite of the quality of the Hindi that I inflicted on him.

While remembering Tiwari-ji, it is important to add that he could flourish as an Indian in Singapore only because this country allowed him to do so. Singapore did not force him to choose between his cultural and national identities; instead, it allowed each identity to merge into and strengthen the other.

I have no doubt that as head of Mindef's Legal Department, and later as head of the AGC's International Affairs Division, he would have defended Singapore's interests with equal tenacity, whether dealing with India or Iceland. What he did not have to do was earn his right to the top jobs by playing down his cultural identity as an Indian.

Mr Tiwari was a devout Hindu, which is to say that he saw no reason to defend his religion by putting down others. He was a karma yogi, one who seeks fulfilment in action without hankering after the fruits of action. Like good karma yogis, he also had a wonderful sense of humour that relished seeing God put pompous piety in its place.

One day, I related to him a sermon that I had heard at Shree Lakshminarayan Temple in Chander Road, with which he was associated closely. In that sermon, a young priest from India told the story (probably apocryphal) of another priest in India.

That priest once arrived at a village to deliver a sermon. The moment he began to speak, an old woman in the audience burst into tears. She followed the priest to the next village, and this time cried loudly as he spoke. Although perplexed, the priest did not question her. And so it was in a third village, and a fourth. She followed him wherever he went, and her lamentations grew louder.

Then it was time for the priest to return home. At the train station, the woman came up to his compartment, clutched the window and wept inconsolably. At this, the priest could not contain himself any longer, and asked: 'Madam, have God's words struck your heart so deeply that you are disconsolate every time you see me?'

The woman composed herself, sniffed and replied: 'No. I had a pet goat that I loved dearly. It went missing just days before you came. The moment I heard your voice, you reminded me of its bleating. I cried helplessly at its memory. Now, will you, too, leave me?'

The guard blew his whistle, the train began to move, the priest slumped back into his seat, and the woman cried at the top of her voice.

The priest at Shree Lakshminarayan Temple who told this story noted its moral: Humans, including priests, should not take themselves so seriously that they forget they are humans. No man of religion is the religion itself.

When I told Mr Tiwari this story in his room, he laughed so loudly that he could be heard back in India.

On the Friday before his death, Mr Tiwari left a stick-on note on the door of his room that read: 'Lecture'. He forgot to remove it when he returned to his room. On Monday, he was gone. The note is there even as I write.

At his funeral, his son asked mourners not to grieve for his father but to celebrate his life and work.

In that spirit, I see him resting in Heaven, listening to lectures, and asking polite but pointed questions. Soon enough, he will head the inter-galactic division of the Attorney-Angel's Chambers. Given the rate at which China and India are growing, it is a matter of time before

even Heaven strikes up economic and strategic partnerships with them. His negotiating skills will be invaluable.

There is no rest for a true karma yogi.

The writer, a former Straits Times leader writer, is a visiting research fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Source: The Straits Times

Jul 31, 2010

MM: Late Tiwari an outstanding legal public officer

SINGAPORE has lost an outstanding legal public officer in Mr S. Tiwari, who died on Monday of a brain haemorrhage, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew said in a condolence letter to Mrs Teekeshwari Tiwari.

In the letter released to the media yesterday, Mr Lee recalled that when he was prime minister, he dealt directly with Mr Tiwari at many a conference.

'He was always well briefed, knew his law and was a skilful negotiator. He knew exactly what our needs and rights were and made sure that our interests were respected when dealing with our neighbours,' he wrote.

Mr Lee cited one instance in which Mr Tiwari made absolutely certain that there was a passage from the Malacca Strait to Singapore's ports where the sea access was completely within the Republic's waters, just in case its neighbours objected to ships using their territorial waters.

He described Mr Tiwari as a 'patient and persistent' negotiator.

The late Mr Tiwari served 36 years in the legal service before retiring in 2007. He then joined the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies as a senior visiting research fellow.

He was among the pioneer group of legal officers specialising in international law.

Mr Tiwari was a key member of Singapore's legal team in the land reclamation case heard by the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, and in the Pedra Branca territorial dispute case heard by the International Court of Justice.

He was also a member of the Singapore delegation that negotiated the free trade agreement with the United States.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Senior Minister S. Jayakumar had also acknowledged Mr Tiwari's decades of distinguished public service in their condolence letters to his widow.

MM Lee ended his letter of July 29 to Mrs Tiwari with these words: 'You have lost a dear husband; Singapore has lost an outstanding legal public officer.'

He was 'everybody's best friend'

Letter from K Kesavapany Director, Institute of South-east Asian Studies

THE article in Today, "Legal Service Veteran dies after complaining of headache", (July 27) gives the impression that Mr Tiwari was not active after his retirement in December 2007 after more than 36 years of service.

Far from it. Mr Tiwari led an active professional and social life until the day of his death.

Immediately after retirement, he joined the Institute of South-east Asian Studies (Iseas) as a Visiting Senior Research Fellow. Posted to the Institute's Asean Studies Centre, he became the Lead Researcher on legal issues related to Asean. In this capacity, he edited the book Asean: Life After the Charter - his final contribution to his years of involvement in Asean-related matters. He was working on a major international conference on copyright issues scheduled to be held early next year.

While at Iseas, he also actively involved himself in social work - including furthering the activities of the Hindi Centre, the setting up of which was his proudest public service achievement.

Mr Tiwari was also an active member in the Kreta Ayer People's Theatre Foundation, an institution founded by the late Dr Goh Keng Swee.

I hope you will publish this letter in the interest of profiling Mr Tiwari as a more rounded Singaporean whom Mr Inderjit Singh described at the funeral on Monday as "everybody's best friend".

URL <http://www.todayonline.com/Voices/EDC100728-0000058/He-was-everybodys-best-friend>

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ST Forum

HOME > ST FORUM > ONLINE STORY

Jul 29, 2010

Tiwari - friend, confidant and colleague

I REFER to Tuesday's report ('Retired top public lawyer S. Tiwari dies').

I got to know Mr Tiwari when he joined the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Iseas). And over 19 months, he became not only a colleague but also a great friend and confidant.

Together with Stephen, another colleague, we became regular lunch partners and often discussed current developments around the world.

Almost every day in the late afternoon, I would take a short break and drop by his room for a chat. I will certainly miss this.

Ever humble, caring and friendly, Mr Tiwari would occasionally treat other colleagues who had worked with him on projects to a modest lunch. He would also casually just pop in the office and surprise us with treats.

He had also been a source of comfort to me. Some time last year, when I was feeling a little down when my mother was hospitalised, he dropped by one day after lunch and surprised me with a slice of my favourite fruit to cheer me up.

There was a humorous side to him too. He would browse through backdated copies of the International Herald Tribune and The Business Times, borrowed from the director's office, and when he returned them, he would say: 'All things borrowed must be returned before Chinese New Year.'

All of us at Iseas will certainly miss a warm and great colleague.

Peter Ee