



give a talk and the Press Club hall was packed with journalists; his speech was measured, deliberate and solemn, like the man himself. It was after the emergency of 1975-77 and the theme was probably the throttling of the press during those dark days.

George was accessible, which neither Girilal nor Sham Lal were. The latter two were reclusive, living in their ivory towers, much like Nanporia. George shared this quality with Frank Moraes.

George gave space to development issues and that is why I was drawn to his writings. In fact, he was directly involved in a development project in Haryana, the progress or lack of which he also gave space to in his paper.

At a lunch hosted by Nalni Dhar Jayal, to which I was invited along with Shekhar Singh and George, I was able to quiz the editor on his autobiography. Why, I asked, had he not been personal in his own life story. The first few pages are about his childhood; the rest is a serious essay. I had been keen to learn what a man of integrity thought of the leaders, politicians and other heroes that peopled his account; his personal take on them. Instead we got this heavy learned stuff. George's answer was a simple: 'If I had made it personal, it would have been another book.' I wanted to say, well that's the book we want.

His last book, *Poste Haste*, published last year when he passed, is a delight (I have reviewed it for that marvellous

journal, *The Rose Bowl*). I attended its launch at the India International Centre. His persona seemed to have undergone a change. He was relaxed, wore a smile every now and then, and told jokes about the members on the panel that included Natwar Singh and Dr Karan Singh. The panellists returned his affection. Karan Singh, his junior in school, said that they became friends because of their fondness for chess, and though George always out-manoeuvred him, winning every round, they were still friends.

His seminal contribution is his work on water. He was pro dams, ie large dams. I was not able to appreciate his position. I had left journalism and was demonstrating with Medha Patkar and Baba Amte on the banks of the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh. ND Jayal too took issue with him on this score. Jayal is an environmentalist and was involved in the setting up of the Ministry of Environment when he was in government. Like Medha, he is against these gigantic temples of modern India.

George exhibited courage in his journalistic career, something one can say of very few in Indian journalism. For the stands he took, he was sacked as editor of the *Hindustan Times*. He annoyed Mrs Gandhi with an editorial on how we had made Sikkim an Indian state or 'Kanchenjunga Here We Come' and he lost out again. Along with Arun Shourie, he is among the three journalists to have been awarded the Magasaysay, the third being the author of *Everybody Loves A Good Drought* (P.

Sainath, 1996).

He was active to the end. The last I saw him was at the launch of Natwar Singh's book, *One Life Is Not Enough*. Natwar made a point of drawing attention to him, remarking that along with George he was the oldest person present. And now you can see him playing chess with his grandson in the photographs put up on Facebook by his son Vijay, also a journalist, who worked with me on the *Sunday Times* many moons ago.

B George Verghese upheld sterling values in journalism, supported investigative work of reporters and backed them against management. He belonged to the British school of journalism; a more sedate but serious journalism.

"IN MY YOUNGER DAYS WHEN I WAS IN THE AIR FORCE, I USED TO STAY WITH HIM IN DELHI. IT'S FUNNY BECAUSE WE FOUGHT OVER THE DAMS. GEORGE WAS AN ECONOMIST IN THE WESTERN MODE WHO BELIEVED GDP WAS EVERYTHING. I'M A NATURE LOVER WHO BELIEVES WE HAVE TO IMPROVE IT AND THAT IT IS THE ONLY REAL WEALTH OF THE COMMON MAN; IT NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED FOR THEIR BENEFIT. DESPITE ALL THIS, I WAS VERY FOND OF GEORGE. HE WAS A REALLY, REALLY FINE MAN. HE RESEARCHED HIS WORK METICULOUSLY, LIKE ON SIACHEN AND TOLD THE GOVERNMENT WHEN IT WAS WRONG."

-NALNI DHAR JAYAL (100 T, 1945)