

## The man who made EPW

### The respected journal, approaching its 50th year, is perhaps the greatest tribute to its long-time Editor, Krishna Raj

By: [SL Rao](#) | October 31, 2015 12:16 AM 0 6 G+0 1

The year 2016 marks the 50th year of one of the most respected journals from India, the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW). On its eve, it will also be appropriate to pay tribute to the Editor who made it so on a shoestring budget, Krishna Raj.

Ace economist Dr KN Raj was closely associated with the Economic Weekly (the EPW's earlier avatar) and its founder, Sachin Chaudhuri. Dr Raj recommended Krishna Raj (Raj), when the Economic Weekly (EW) needed an able hand. I think that was in 1958.

I had come to know Raj after he joined the Delhi School of Economics (DSE), a year after me, in 1955. Like me and my dear friend Bodhishwar Rai (who later became MD of SBI and then the chairman of Allahabad Bank), Raj (a Nair) belonged to a lower-middle class family. He came from Daryaganj, in Delhi, where Bodhishwar also lived, and it was natural for the three of us to become close friends. Raj's father ran a paper then, called Daryaganj Times.

Within a few months of joining DSE, Raj started the DSE paper ECHO, bringing it out on a monthly basis. It was very popular, widely-read and was well-written. Even members of the faculty and visitors read it. It was, in fact, a source cited in the Dharma Kumar-edited book, D.school.

Raj was an average student but kind and considerate to all, thoughtful, a man of a few softly spoken words, who rarely expressed an opinion and listened to what you had to say very patiently. He carried these qualities to the end.

They made him the great Editor he was. His personality grew on you as you got to know him better. It is therefore not surprising that many distinguished scholars around the world made it a point to meet him in Bombay and proudly call him their friend.

After he went to Bombay to work for the EW, I met him often since I had joined Hindustan Lever in 1957. There, he proved himself a great boon to Chowdhuri and his successor as editor, Dr Ravi K Hazari. He did everything in the paper, including staying late at the press every Friday to put the paper to bed. Amazingly, despite complex articles and tables, the EW was always well-produced and never had a typo! Its content was also unique, with scholarly articles, many

published there for the first time. Unusual for its name, it also had many pages of political commentary and discussions on policy. It was unique to India and it was not surprising that it developed an international reputation. It was perhaps the only journal from India that was globally recognised at the time—and perhaps continues to be so. Bright young researchers and well-established scholars alike, all wanted to be published in it. Despite being a non-refereed journal, it was widely referred to by scholars everywhere.

Raj joined EW in 1960 and became Editor of the EPW in 1968, and stayed till he died in 2004. The Sameeksha Trust was formed in 1966 to ensure long-term financial viability of EPW, and the EPW Research Foundation was formed in 2003. Raj almost never missed a day at work, six days a week. Late in life, he would only take a vacation to visit his son, Padmanabhan, in the US. The EW and the EPW were his life.

The EW became the EPW when Dr KN Raj and others formed the Sameeksha Trust to own and run it, so that its post-Sachin Chaudhuri future could be assured. Early trustees were Ashok Mitra, KN Raj, KS Krishnawami and other scholars. EPW was fearless in its comments on issues and had no qualms in disagreeing with government policies or views of eminent people. Till about the 1980s, it was radically left-wing in its views. Possibly, the influence of Ashok Mitra, the eminent economist and avowed communist, economic advisor to the prime minister Indira Gandhi, and for long, the finance minister of West Bengal, was an important reason. It was so radically left-wing in its views that many less ideologically-committed and eminent scholars (for example, Dr Ashok Desai and Dr Dharma Kumar) who did not agree with its one-sided partisanship, and ideological rigidity, would not write for it. But many others did. There was no comparable Indian journal with the same reputation and reach in the intelligentsia.

But Raj was not an ideologue. He had considerable sympathy for the poor and marginalised, but he was not aggressively for state ownership and control. Ashok Mitra and the left-wing ideology of the day was not so merely on economics, but also political. He was against liberal economic reforms (for example, greater freedom to invest and compete for private entrepreneurs, more flexible labour laws, encouragement of large production capacities and diversification by industrial manufacturers, private investment in infrastructure, etc). Subsequent chairmen of Sameeksha Trust neither had extreme views nor tried to influence the EPW. The EPW became more balanced from the late-1980s. In the 1970s, the powerful chairman of ICICI, HT Parekh, put the trust on a better financial base. Later, they were bankers like DN Ghosh and Deepak Parekh. Today, it is the eminent economist, Deepak Nayyar.

For most of his life with the EW and EPW, Raj was paid a pittance as salary. He always travelled by bus or train. He travelled very little in India or abroad, despite numerous invitations from foreign and domestic academic institutions and sponsors. With two children to raise, his scholar wife, Dr Maithreyi Krishna Raj, was in some ways a single parent, with Raj at the paper for over 12 hours a day. Additionally, she brought in an income that enabled the family to enjoy a reasonable quality of life. I remember, in the early-1970s, he told me he had persuaded the trustees to create a provident fund for the staff, but did not have one himself. When he was invited to join the board of the state-owned Dena Bank by the government, he faithfully repaid the modest sitting fee to the EPW. His logic was that he was invited because he was Editor of EPW, and so the fee belonged to the weekly.

After I left Bombay and became an occasional visitor to the city, I cherished the long telephone conversations with him late in the evenings. He would still be at work then. He always would ask searching questions about the welfare of my family and we would talk of current events. He was a rare human being. The EPW, approaching its landmark year, is perhaps the greatest tribute to him.

The author is former director general, NCAER, and was the first chairman of the CERC

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