

Shri. K. C. Pant – an eulogy

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On 15 November 2012 I lost a very dear friend of mine [Shri. K. C. Pant](#) - the former Defence Minister of India. He was 81 years of age and is survived by two sons and his charming wife Mrs. Ila Pant who was a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) M.P. Just two days ago on Diwali day (13 November) I had spoken to him on phone for almost ½ hour to wish him and to enquire about his health. We discussed the farmers' agitation in Maharashtra and other matters, and he asked me about when I was coming to Delhi. I used to speak quite often with him on the phone and hence it came as a shock to hear about his sudden demise just two days after talking to him.

Our age difference was about 20 years and yet he was a very dear friend of mine. Talking with him, meeting him at his house in Delhi and spending countless hours with him and Mrs. Pant was invigorating. He was a living history and I feel blessed to have known him and to have heard from him about the players who shaped modern India – starting from his father [Shri. Govind Ballabh Pant](#) to Prime Ministers Smt. [Indira Gandhi](#), Shri. Rajiv Gandhi and Shri. Atal Bihari Vajpayee under all of whom he served with distinction as cabinet minister in various major ministries including home, defence, finance, energy etc.

I first met Shri. Pant or Pantji (as he was called) in 1983. He had become the first chairman of Advisory Board on Energy (ABE) – a body set up by Smt. Indira Gandhi to advise the Prime Minister on matters of energy. I was introduced to him by [Shri. Sunder Lal](#), a very senior M.P. of congress party and almost like a father-figure to me. A 15-minute meeting was scheduled which stretched to almost 45 minutes. He was extremely interested in all aspects of energy and also knew my American professor [Dr. Farber](#), under

whom I had done my Ph.D. in U.S. It was in the same meeting that I also met [Dr. EAS Sarma](#) and [Jairam Ramesh](#). Dr. Sarma was then the Joint Secretary and Jairam Ramesh was Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in ABE. Since then I and Dr. Sarma have remained as close friends. I have also remained in touch with Jairam Ramesh.

During his ABE days I used to meet Pant ji regularly and he became fond of me. I used to regularly write to him and tell him about energy matters in rural India. I lost touch with him after Smt. Gandhi's death since he moved to different ministries under Rajiv Gandhi. Later on when we reconnected in 2004, he always used to ask me why I never kept in touch.

I again met him in February 2004 when he was the [Vice Chairman, Planning Commission](#). He was happy to see me and we talked for an hour. He enquired about various things I was working on and told his colleagues in the Planning Commission (PC) to look carefully at the cooking and lighting technology mission that I was proposing. A detailed meeting in PC took place on this mission and a [note on it was prepared](#). Naturally after BJP's defeat in May 2004 nobody at the PC cared about the note or the proceedings.

After 2004 I started to meet him regularly and made it a point to spend a couple of hours with him whenever I went to Delhi. These countless hours that we spent together discussing various issues about the state of India, how his father played a stellar role in freedom movement, and how things can be made better in the country are cherished moments.

He spoke nostalgically about his time with Smt. Gandhi, and he always spoke very highly of her and her great feeling for the country. He told me many instances of how Smt. Indira Gandhi always thought of India first and then of anything else and how she entrusted him the delicate task of negotiating with Akalis, Nagas and separatists in J&K. Though I used to get upset about the present state of affairs in the country, Pantji never spoke disparagingly about the present crop of politicians whom he knew very well.

He served with great distinction in almost every important ministry of Government of India (GOI) and could have played a very important role in congress party had he not left it. Similarly after 2004, I feel BJP also sidelined him. It is a sad state of affairs that a person like Shri. K. C. Pant with huge administrative and political experience was never consulted. I am sure his sane voice and wisdom would have helped the parties.

He was a very soft-spoken person with deep understanding of the political process in its true sense. This breed of politicians – those who think deeply about the issues facing the country, are well read and have broad and proper perspective of the country, has all but vanished from India.

Being much younger than him, I sometimes felt discouraged and despaired about India's future with daily reports of corruption, scandals, and other scams. Yet he always told me to look at the bigger picture and how through ages this country has brought itself out of darkness.

We corresponded extensively and he was very fond of reading all my articles on both technology and spirituality. He read my books and we discussed in detail some of the articles on spirituality. In fact he always commented that this combination of [technology and spirituality](#) is the future of India and the world.

In my meetings and talks I used to always request him that since he and his family were at the center of India's political process, he should write about it for future generations. He told me of his failed attempt at getting his father Shri. Govind Ballabh Pant to do it and said that who will be interested in reading about it anyway. I have always felt that such people who have played an important role in the Government or have helped in shaping the history of India should consider it as their duty to write the history of their work for future generations. In Pantji's death we have lost a treasure trove of insights and information.

He was generous to a fault. When I and my wife Nandini were going to Binsar (a hill resort in Kumaon, Uttarakhand) in 2009, he immediately told us to halt at night and stay in his beautiful bungalow in Bhowali (near Nainital). We [had a very pleasant stay for two nights in the bungalow](#) which had books and memorabilia of Shri. Govind Ballabh Pant. Similar stories of his large heartedness were narrated to me by other friends.

He was a great and noble soul and death came suddenly and without pain. He died of massive cardiac failure. He did not want any public display on his death – a mark of great human being, so he was quietly cremated.

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