



Dr Raj Bhan An Institution

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LIFE is so strange. Exactly seven years ago, on 26 January 2013, I was celebrating the news of the well-deserved Padma Bhushan award for my dear friend Raj Bhan. Exactly on the same day, seven years later, I got this sad news that Raj is no more with us. I was shattered.

I and Raj came to know each other after he became the Secretary of Department of Biotechnology in the year 2014. I was then the Director-General of CSIR. In fact, I had the privilege of being a member of the selection committee and saw how highly every member thought of him.

Raj and I became very close friends very quickly. CSIR & DBT worked together closer than ever. I remember Mr Kapil Sibal was then the Minister of Science and Technology. He used to hold regular weekly meetings of all the science secretaries. Raj used to excel with his ideas, with his vision and his bold thinking, but all presented in his characteristically gentle but persuasive way.

Raj's own research contributions have had a huge impact on reducing child mortality and improving child health in India. These include development of a Rotavirus vaccine, Zinc as treatment of diarrhoea, low osmolarity ORS, identification of enteroaggregative *E. coli* and its association with persistent diarrhoea in children and treatment approaches to this disorder.

I always said that Make in India cannot be just 'assembled' in India, but it has to be 'invented in India' and 'Made in India'. Rotavirus vaccine is a brilliant example of that. And the nation will remain eternally grateful to him.

The Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illness (IMNCI) integrated programme developed under his chairmanship was introduced in the

reproductive child health programme of the Government of India and had a great impact.

Raj was a transformative leader. Raj established many new Institutes, clusters and innovation support agencies, which changed the biotechnology landscape in the country.

Among many of his initiatives, I remember THSTI, namely Translational Health Science and Technology Institute that he created. India is well known for its inventions, but the journey from mind to marketplace or ideas to impact does not take place so well. Raj had a clear understanding of the challenges and this unique initiative filled the gap most admirably.

But most important of his creations was BIRAC, i.e. Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council. It has been an absolutely pioneering institution, which had a huge impact in fuelling biotechnology entrepreneurship in India. If you meet any start-up in biotechnology today her/his first reaction would be that I am where I am because of BIRAC support in my formative years.

Raj was an extraordinary human being. His warmth, his affection, his simplicity, his humility, his open mind and all this coupled with the penchant for excellence made him an extraordinary icon.

I have lost a very close friend. His phone call to me was always 'Rameshbhai, this is Raj. Do you have a couple of minutes?' I will miss these affectionate phone calls. I will miss those warm hugs that we gave to each other as soon as we met anywhere.

We will sorely miss Raj. But, to me, Raj was not an individual. He was an institution. Individuals go but institutions stay on. So Raj, the Institution will stay on forever.

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