

BIHARAT RATNA FOR  
KAMARAJ

While generally Presidential Awards please only the recipients and friends, the conferment of the highest Award, Bharat Ratna, posthumously on Kamaraj has thrilled the whole nation. By this thoughtful action, the President has honoured the memory of one of India's noblest sons. Pandit Nehru once said of Kamaraj that if a person without advantage of birth, formal education, fortune or connections should rise to be not only the undisputed but most popular leader of the intellectual State of Madras, he must have qualities of a rare order. Burning patriotism, charming simplicity, total dedication to the service of the masses, highest integrity and utter selflessness combined to make him a colossus among men. A man of robust commonsense, sober judgment, firm decision and few words, Kamaraj was one of the most respected politicians whether in or out of office. When I mildly remonstrated him while discussing the Kamaraj plan that the people of Tamil Nadu would be deprived of his inestimable services, he said that in this country Saints would be more honoured than Kings. It was his view that those who rendered service to the people would be



honoured whether they were in office or not, while those who did not render service would be despised even if they were in the highest position. This truth was demonstrated during his last days and on his demise, by the spontaneous mourning by the millions. I once joked that under the Kamaraj plan many might go out of office but only one person would remain out of office and that would be Kamaraj. Speaking of Kanchi Acharya Swamigal, Kamaraj said that he had no competence to talk of the Acharya's erudition but he admired the Acharya for the utter self-abnegation with which he denudded himself of the position of Peetathipathi and retired to a small hut.

There was a faint echo of the great Acharya's way in the Kamaraj plan. Few people know that Kamaraj had invited

Dr Subbaroyan to head the Madras Government in 1954 and had to step in at the last moment as the former did not turn up for the election, that in 1966, there was a considerable volume of opinion in the Congress organization pressing him to take up the responsibility of the Prime Ministership and that after his election to Parliament from Nagercoil, he did not avail himself of the opportunity to join the Government. Kamaraj preferred to be Counselor rather than be the King himself. Nevertheless, as an administrator, he set a high standard of efficiency and integrity during his time that lifted Tamil Nadu from the third place from the bottom in economic development when he took charge, to the third place from the top when he left it. Kamaraj hankered after neither office nor after titles and one is not sure if he would have personally accepted any Award. On the analogy of the award of Bharat Ratna to Dr Bidan Chandra Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal, it was my desire that Kamaraj should be similarly honoured. Somewhere in the files of the Tamil Nadu Secretariat, some such note still exists but the move was scotched by Kamaraj himself with a summary dismissal. He will continue to live in our memory not only as a Bharat Ratna but as an eternal Bharat Jothi.

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the city, near Madras Central Station with dilapidated small cages with filth and litter scattered all around. Because of polluted air and smoke emanating from the neighbouring railway station and radiation from heavy vehicular traffic, animals are constant victims of dreadful diseases and this, coupled with continuous "noise explosion" created by the whistling of incoming and outgoing trains and the voices of surging humanity, has made them look pale and lifeless. Forty-four varieties of birds, a few tiger cubs, iron-tail chimpanzees, camels, etc., are likely to be added to the Zoo shortly.

So, the State Government's pro-

posal to shift the zoo to a 300-acre site at Vandalur, near the city, where animals can live in natural environment in large enclosures with sufficient space to roam about and inhale fresh air can be considered a right step. The proposed zoo at Vandalur, with more additions, will be remodelled on the lines of the Hyderabad Zoological Gardens, it is gathered. The fear lurking in the minds of a section of the authorities that the gate collection may fall considerably, may come true when this project materialises. As the health of the animals cannot be sacrificed for money and as an essential public utility service like a good zoo is to be maintained for the benefit of the community, any idea of running it on commer-

cial lines should not gain currency.

Frequent reports of poaching of the inmates at the Guindy Park are on the air. As the fencing is also inept, deer are frequent victims of accidents while crossing over the busy Guindy-Adyar Road. The authorities may take suitable steps so that the lovely park is preserved from decay. It is distressing to note that several inmates of Veeramata Jijabai Bhosle Udayan of Bombay have died in the course of the last few years due to vulnerable diseases. Even today the zoo authorities have not been able to find proper replacements and several cages remain vacant. The Bombay Municipal Corporation, which controls it, has plans to