

Insight into Castro's Positive revolution

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Fidel Castro

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Insight into Castro's Positive revolution

Fourteen Indians and seven Pakistanis were together for 10 days. They lived together in the same comfort and cordial atmosphere at Hotel Havana Libre in Havana, capital of Cuba. They greeted each other, smiled, gossiped and discussed serious issues: now and then. They all cherished one common dream: when will we all, as neighbours, be able to live as human beings?

The atmosphere was created by a great and adorable human being; Fidel Castro. He was our host. The skyscraper Havana Libre was home to us 1,200 guests from three continents: of Asia, Africa and Latin America who were there for a tricontinental conference January, 1966.

Being the youngest member of the delegation, I was full of curiosity, anxiety and even worried sometimes. One month in Cuba was most inspiring and educational experience in my life. Morning till midnight plenaries, group sessions, cultural events and sumptuous food dominated all the 10 days.

The focus of Castro's opening Welcome speech

stressed the need for tricontinental understanding and solidarity at all levels. Without that, a just and peaceful humanitarian society was impossible, he insisted. Castro was always with people. He moved around in a small car with one body-guard besides the driver. No security paraphernalia.

Formal conference over, before leaving for a two-week nationwide tour, one morning Castro suddenly appeared in the huge dining hall during breakfast and greeted all of us. Pointing out through the window he asked: "Who would like to join me for climbing that mountain over there? Only four hours." Instantly, about 30 of us youngsters jumped to our feet shouting: "Yes, Fidel, I do, I do..."

In the next few minutes, a huge military truck pulled in. We were all driven to the military camp few miles away and provided with warm jackets, and moved towards the forest. Castro was already waiting for us. "Let's start climbing," he greeted us with a clap, grand smile and added: "This was one of my hideouts eight years ago."

The next two hours we walked and jumped, briskly to keep pace with him, stumbling over rocks and rivulets, excited and exhausted, but with delight and electrified nerves. When we

reached on top of a flat spot, he stopped and asked us to sit around in circle. Then he gave a little introduction of the mountain and declared: "Guess what is uppermost in my mind today? This evening I am going to ask my people one question: should we not help the most suffering people on earth today, the Vietnamese? Cuba is going to get 50,000 tonnes of rice from China shortly. Should we not ask China to send that rice to the people of Vietnam?"

We, the 30 youths, clapped and shouted in one voice: "Great idea, Do that Fidel. Viva Cuba." That very evening in the Revolution Plaza in Havana city where Fidel explained the mountain-top decision to over 30,000 people, the entire crowd clapped and raised hands shouting in chorus: "Viva Fidel, Viva Vietnam."

Total literacy:

Over 100 miles away in a mountain slope, a huge building was coming up. This is going to be our first engineering college," the interpreter explained to us. "We have already recruited 2000 students who will be studying here. They will be the first engineers of new Cuba!" Far away from Havana, a village and beautifully built school!

As soon as the revolution was over in 1959, one of Castro's priorities was total literacy. For

one year, all schools in the country were closed down. All teachers and senior students spread out into countryside, each one stayed with a farmer's family, taught the whole family during night and during the day worked with them in their fields.

There was no electricity, and therefore the government provided a kerosene lantern to each volunteer-teacher. "Around the lantern the whole family would sit and learn their lessons with me," explained a proud teacher in another village: Within a year the whole country was literate!

Education, agriculture and health. These were given the top priority by Castro and his revolutionary team in the 1960s. So today, we know how Cuba has been capable of providing free medical education and training to 52,000 students as doctors from 130 countries every year, how Cuba had given enormous help to several African countries, why the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called Cuba's Latin American Medical School as the "most advanced medical school in the world."

While leaving Cuba after a month, Castro had given me a small bag of parting gift. It contained a bottle of the famous Bacardy, which I had

decided to present to that person who would make a constructive revolution in India.

These days, as people around the world are mourning the demise of Fidel Castro, I feel it a terrible personal loss to me as the only Indian who had that opportunity to climb a mountain with with him and share several of his thoughts and dreams.

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E P Menon or fondly known as EP a Writer, Educationist, Gandhian and political thinker was born on Sept 10, 1936 at Thrissur, Kerala.

He participated in movements led by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan for 7 years, Marched on foot around the world protesting the nuclear weapons, which took almost 3 years.

His passion has been talking to youth on Humanistic values and preparing them for a better future and make efforts for a borderless world.