

A tribute to an industry icon

RK Krishnakumar was the personification of integrity and benevolence and a pillar for the Tata group

RK Raghavan

I am devastated by the sudden passing away of my dear friend RK Krishnakumar — affectionately known as KK — in Mumbai on the New Year day.

We spoke at length four days ago when I gave him a lowdown on the Carnatic music scene. Our conversations were always Marathonic! Since he was curious about everything — not merely acquisitions and mergers — he listened to me intently when I waxed eloquence on the current strengths and weaknesses of Carnatic music, a subject that was alien to him. As usual he listened more than he spoke.

He was very nostalgic whenever we recalled our college days in Madras of the yore. He was particularly ecstatic whenever I referred to Prof R Bhaskaran, who headed the Politics Department at

the Madras University in the late 1950s. (Incidentally, Bhaskaran studied under the famous Harold Laski at the London School of Economics.)

This was his hallmark. The last time we met was several years ago at the Music Academy when he was extending due courtesies to Indira Nooyi who was visiting Chennai, and he introduced me to her in flattering terms. He was generous to his friends with his time and influence.

CHARITY WORK

KK was a pillar of strength to the Tata group for over five decades. Known to be an alter ego of Ratan Tata, he brought dynamism both to Tata Tea and Tata Hotels. In retirement he lent stature to Tata Charities. There could not have been a better choice to administer the huge funds available in the group for relief to needy organisations and individuals. He was integrity and



RK Krishnakumar (1938-2023)

benevolence personified.

His tough stand vis-a-vis the ULFA when the latter demanded a ransom after abducting some tea estate workers will go down in history as an example of how not to cow down to terrorism

Although he was a Malayali he was essentially a Madras boy who sparked in

academic pursuits. We were together at the Presidency College for our Master's in Political Science.

He pipped me at the final examination to join the prestigious Tata Administrative Service. He wanted to join the Police — his father was a senior police officer — and I the private sector. Providence ordained that exactly the opposite happened. He never looked back and brought glory to his tasks.

KK was religious to the core and visited Sabarimala every month till his health permitted him to do so.

In sum, he was a model who proved that, contrary to popular belief, one could be wholly ethical in private industry.

His life deserves not only to be celebrated but emulated by our youth.

As long as I live I will miss him for his warmth and geniality.

The writer is a former CBI Director