

CV: J.C. RAJARAO

J.C. Rajarao, known as JC or just Rao, is an old boy, I should say very old boy, of the Penang Free School which he joined in 1947. He was described as a good, active, impish but bright student. He held many commanding positions, including being President of the Literary and Debating Society, Chairman of the Music and Drama Society, a King's Scout, Troop leader, President of the Patrol Leaders Parliament, Penang, Editor of the School magazine, Senior Prefect and held many other posts too. It is still his pride that no one has simultaneously held as many leading posts as he has had at any one time, before or after him at PFS! But he confesses he was never a good athlete or a sports man. He was better indoors than outdoors!

Even before his PFS schooling days, during the Japanese occupation, when he was hardly 13-years' old, he joined the Balak Sena, a youth force to free India. And his training camp and hostel was in the Penang Free School! Since then too he became a champion of freedom, human rights and justice for all irrespective of race, religion or credos. He has written about this impact and the school's influence on him in an article published in **“The FAJAR Generation; The University Socialist Club and the Politics of Postwar Malaya and Singapore”**.

Rao left school in 1953 and joined the University of Malaya (in Singapore) on a government scholarship. He had to turn down the award of the Penang Settlement Scholarship to read for law in UK, for his mother preferred him to be nearer home. At the University, he was most active with the University Socialist Club. Here too he took on responsibilities first as the Secretary of the Editorial Committee of FAJAR, later as the Editor of FAJAR, and eventually was elected as the Club's President.

Rao graduated in 1958 with a First Class Honours degree in History, his thesis being **“Public Administration in Penang: 1786 – 1832”** obviously reflecting his deep links with Penang. After teaching history for a year at the University of Singapore, he left for the School of Oriental & African Studies in 1959 on a British Council Scholarship and subsequently was awarded the Commonwealth Scholarship for his rapid research and excellence. However, differences between him and one of his supervisors in his interpretation of facts in his thesis titled **“The Development of Local Self-Government in Malaya”**, caused him to resign his scholarship and return home without his post-graduate degree, although he had half written his thesis. When he returned home he was harassed by the Special Branch for his left-wing activities both in Singapore and UK, and the Malayan government had instructed all its agencies not to employ him for he was branded a communist. So, he was as good as a vagabond for some two years pleading for any appointment with any one for he was married and with two young children.

His plea for a job was successful when in 1962, his former geography teacher, Mr. J.M.B. Hughes, then the Head Master, gave him a temporary teacher's post in spite of the government's instructions. He served PFS for close to three years. In mid-1964 he joined the Socialist run Penang City Council as the Asst. City Secretary. In this capacity, he had introduced various programmes and activities for the benefit of the Penang community.

Examples are like being the Honorary Librarian where he started a monthly Art Exhibition, a Sixth Form Section and Reading Stories for children every Sunday mornings and motivating them to read. He was also active with the Tree Planting Campaigns, and organized monthly lectures in the Town Hall by inviting eminent scholars and professionals to talk on topics that both informed and educated the city folks. He also ensured proactive participation of the young at school by inviting their bands to play every week at the Botanic Gardens, Dato Kramat Padang and at the Esplanade. He himself gave many talks on motivating young and old people and took part as speaker in many forums.

Rao also taught history at the University of Malaya. And as usual, he left the University of Malaya over a matter of principle when his Department was advised to give favoured treatment for the Malays. They were to be given additional marks to pass the exams if they had just failed by a couple of marks! Thus he left his teaching there and concentrated on his work at the Rubber Research Institute of Malaysia (RRIM) which he joined in 1966. He left the City Council George Town, Penang when the Barisan National government took over the Council's administration and abolished the freely elected representative system. This was in 1966. His leaving was also a matter of principle as he feared he could become victimized for one reason or another.

At the RRIM, he became the Head of the Publications, Library and Information Division and its principle public relations link with Universities and public media until he retired in 1987. While at the RRIM, he was the editor of no less than twenty separately titled publications annually. These included scientific journals, specific reports, planters' bulletins, academic texts and promotional literature. And he was the chief organizer or coordinator of all the national and international conferences. He was also elected as the President of the Senior Staff Association and was the Chairman of the RRIM Sports Club. He was sent on a three year term, 1979-1982, and quartered in UK at the research laboratories in Brickendonbury, Hertsforshire, from where he visited all the RRIM offices in many parts of the world, to co-ordinate its publication and promotional policies affecting various aspects of natural rubber.

Since retirement, he has edited and published more than couple of books related to the development of natural rubber and plastics in Malaysia. One of the books he recently authored is titled "*The Legacy of MARDEC: Its Origin, Development and Contributions to the Natural Rubber Industry.*" The book did so well that the first print was sold within six months and the second print was launched by Tun Musa Hitam, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia last November. He has also written the MASTEC Report 2007 for the Academy of Sciences and has edited several scientific papers and a couple of books for the Academy. Most interesting to read would be his contribution of a Chapter published in *The FAJAR Generation: Postwar Politics in Malaya and Singapore*. Here, he briefly recollects the impact PFS had on him, which book has also contributions from several doctors whom we may have been acquainted with as they all graduated from the University of Malaya in Singapore. Some Old Frees, perhaps know him best for his short book on the **History of Penang Free School, and the Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Old Frees Association** which is also completely sold

out. This has a couple of articles from him which bears testimony to his innate mischief and wit! He is currently writing a book on the Malaysian Estate Staff Provident Fund and how it came into being and has affected workers and employees in plantations.

In all, Rao has led a very active life, and remains steadfast with his principles and certainly enjoys a sharp sense of humour. And for a man who is hitting 82 his life style is amazing. He says “Age does not matter; but what matters should not age!”

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