

# “A moment of truth”

**Badruddin Tyabji talks to VIVEK SHUKLA**

**A** CROWD of memories haunts Mr Badruddin Tyabji, 86, an ICS officer of 1932 batch of the Punjab cadre when you talk to him about the turbulent days of our freedom struggle.

Mr Tyabji was a number of the Constituent Assembly, which was formed prior to our freedom in order to finalise the details as to how free India would be administered and was attached to the committee which was to decide our national symbols.

While recalling those days, Mr Tyabji spoke of how it was he who had suggested that the Charkha (Spinning Wheel) in the Indian National Congress flag should be replaced with Ashok Dharma Chakra (Wheel of destiny) in our national flag, while adding that we should

said Mr Tyabji, who is the grandson of Mr Badruddin Tyabji, the third president of the Indian National Congress. Mr Tyabji went on to add that “the only point on which I later failed to carry the committee with me was on the colour of the flag. I had proposed black but it was turned down on the ground that black was inauspicious. It was then agreed that it should be navy blue, which I still feel was aesthetically a blunder. Moreover, the navy blue on our flag soon fades and becomes a light blue; and that goes even less with the saffron, white, and green of the rest of the flag.”

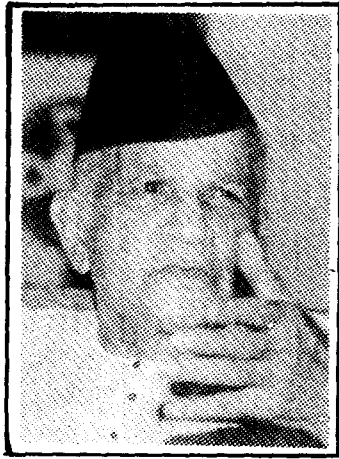
al flag. However, the other members of the committee stood firm in this matter.

Interestingly, Mr Badruddin Tyabji was also involved with the organising of the historic ceremony when Viceroy Lord Mountbatten administered the oath of prime ministership to Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru on August 15, 1947. That was the climax of his work in the Constituent Assembly. Recalls Tyabji, “I metamorphosed the Central Library Hall of the old Legislative Assembly and Chamber of Princes complex into a Constitution Hall, with tiers of seats in the form of upholstered benches with backrests for over six hundred people.”

Mr Tyabji, who was then a Joint Secretary in the Constituent Assembly, suggested to Pandit Nehru to wear formal dress — a white achkan and Churidar Pyjamas with black shoes and socks and his suggestion was accepted.

Mr Tyabji adds that the most punishing part of his work was deciding who should be invited to attend that historic function, and to deal with the thousands of people who wished to be there but had to be denied admission for lack of space. There was enormous pressure on both Sir B. N. Rau, the Constitutional Adviser of the Constituent Assembly and on him. “I knew how susceptible Sir Rau was especially to female pressure, so it was agreed between us that he should pass on all requests to me and I should deal with them on their merits. I must express my gratitude and admiration for the way in which he stood for me after that, and never interfered with my decisions,” noted Tyabji.

“As no headgear was prescribed for the function I decided to put on a towering dull-gold silk turban tied over a gold and green embroidered Kullah. Mrs Paulette Lakshmanan, the French wife of friend in AIR was present there, made a perceptive comment on it. She said that it was not only a sign of my vanity, but a defiant gesture to assert there, in the absence of Muslims who had migrated to Pakistan, the abiding Muslim presence in secular India. I think there were some substance in Mrs Lakshmanan remark,” concludes Mr Tyabji.



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## FLASHBACK

also not desert the Congress flag under which the independence movement had been fought. “I opposed the Charkha on the flag since it would not look the same from both sides. As it was, on the Congress flag it looked right only when seen from one side. Looked at from the other side the spindle came before the wheel,” recalls Tyabji. Smiling he says, in a way it was good that the Charkha didn’t get a place in our national flag for the reason that later in the economic policies of the Congress, the Charkha became irrelevant.

Tyabji went on to say that, “Dr Rajendra Prasad, Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, was highly impressed by my suggestion of Ashok Dharma Chakra. But, he asked me to inform Bapu about my idea. I immediately went to Balmiki Temple at Panchkuin Road, where Bapu was staying. Bapu gave me a patient hearing. After I presented my case for the Ashok Dharma Chakra. He finally relented. But before giving me the green signal there and then, he asked to be shown the model of the proposed national flag with the Ashok Dharma Chakra in it. So I went to Connaught place and purchased a piece of cloth. My wife, Suriya, who was a painter painted on the flag. When Bapu saw the specimen flag, he happily said, “Okay, I am satisfied with it.”

“It was a moment of truth for me,”

Mr Tyabji still recalls vividly how Mr K. R. Munshi had made a vehement plea before the committee for adopting the traditional Hindu saffron flag (the Bhagwa) as the nation-