



Celebrating Freedom

Independence Day in India marks the country's freedom from British colonial rule in 1947. It is a day of pride, patriotism, and reflection, observed with flag hoisting ceremonies, cultural programs, and tributes to national heroes. The Prime Minister addresses the nation from the Red Fort in Delhi, recalling the sacrifices of freedom fighters and highlighting national progress. Schools, institutions, and communities across the country participate in celebrations. This day not only commemorates India's hard-won independence but also inspires citizens to uphold the values of democracy, unity, and diversity that define the nation.



As darkness descended swiftly across the hills of Bhojpur, I had no idea that the most unforgettable conversation of my military life was still ahead of me. As the meal slowly took shape, I looked around the little kitchen. There were no baskets of vegetables. No fruit. No sacks of grain stacked against the wall. Winter had stripped the hills of abundance. The terraced fields lay bare until spring. Whatever had been harvested months earlier had to last until the next growing season. I noticed Amma glance upwards towards the smoke-darkened rafters. Hanging from the bamboo beams was a single green chilli, tied carefully with a piece of string. It had been kept there to dry slowly in the warmth of the hearth, preserved for the days when nothing else remained to flavour a meal. She reached up carefully and untied it. Holding it gently in her hand, she smiled almost apologetically. "I was saving this for later." Then, she looked at me. "But today, my son's Saab has come."

Before I could reply, she quietly walked outside into the courtyard. A few moments later, I heard the unmistakable fluttering of wings. When she returned, she was carrying the village's only luxury. The solitary hen that had been scratching in the courtyard only minutes earlier. I immediately understood what she intended to do. "No, Amma," I said gently. "Please don't." She looked at me with quiet determination. "It is our honour. This chicken curry was Chattr's favourite dish. Today, it is for you." There are moments when refusing generosity would wound more deeply than accepting it. I said nothing more. She disappeared behind the house.

A short while later, she returned

carrying the bird, now cleaned and ready for cooking. With practised hands she lit the fire, placed an old, blackened pot upon the clay hearth and slowly prepared the meal. The aroma of wood smoke, fresh chicken, and the single green chilli soon filled the tiny room. As I watched her move quietly about the kitchen, I realised that this was probably the most expensive meal she would prepare all winter. Not because of money but because of what it cost her to give it.

In the Army, we often speak of sacrifice in terms of gallantry under fire. Yet, some sacrifices never appear in citations. An elderly mother, living alone in a remote Himalayan village, giving away her only chicken and the last green chilli she had been saving for the winter because her son's Commanding Officer had come to visit is one of them.

We sat cross-legged on the mud floor and shared the meal. She apologised repeatedly. "Saab, if Chattr had been here, I would have cooked better." I found myself unable to answer immediately. After a long silence, I finally said, "Amma, I have eaten in officers' messes and state banquets across many countries. But I do not think I shall ever eat another meal prepared with so much love." She lowered her eyes. For the first time since I had arrived, she smiled, not with happiness, but with the quiet satisfaction of a mother who believed she had honoured her son's memory.

A Mother's Question

Dinner ended quietly. The little clay bowls were washed with precious water and placed upside down on a wooden shelf beside the hearth. Amma carefully swept the mud floor before spreading a simple mattress for herself near the dying fire after insisting that I take the bed. Outside, the village had fallen silent. There was no electricity in HATHUA. Darkness belonged completely to the mountains. The only light came from the embers glowing softly beneath the cooking pot. For a long time, neither of us spoke. The warmth of the fire seemed to invite memories.

Amma rose slowly and walked

Command Does Not End When The Firing Stops Sometimes, That Is Precisely Where It Begins

PART:2



towards the old iron trunk standing beside the bed. She untied the small brass key from the corner of her shawl and unlocked it with practised hands. The hinges creaked gently. Inside lay everything that remained of Rifleman Chattr Bahadur Rai. There was no disorder. Every article had its place. His olive-green beret rested carefully, wrapped in a piece of white cloth. Beside it lay his kukri, still gleaming despite the passing years. There were neatly folded letters, his identity card, service documents, photographs, and the medals that the nation had awarded after his death. Nothing had been moved unnecessarily. Nothing had been forgotten. She lifted each item with extraordinary tenderness, not as possessions but as memories. Finally, she took out a photograph. It showed a young Chattr in the uniform of 2nd Battalion, 11 Gorkha Rifles (Shingo). His beret sat perfectly. His boots shone. There was confidence in his smile. The quiet confidence that I remembered so well.

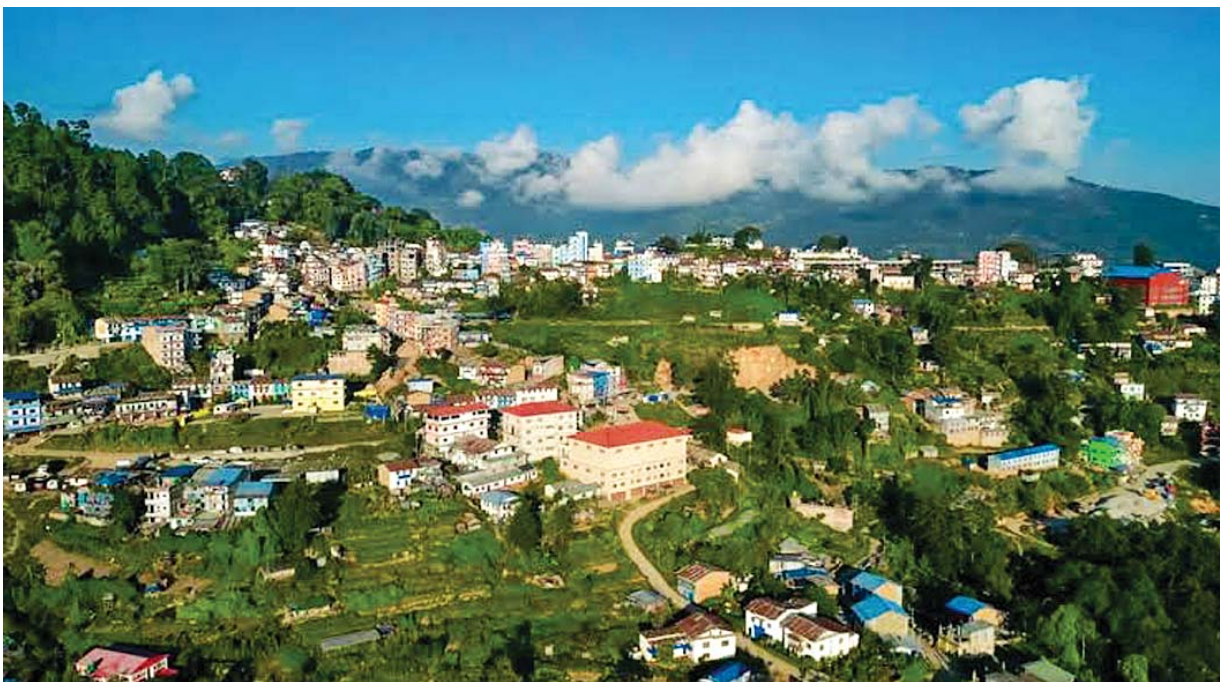
She handed me the photograph. "Saab, he looked happy."

"Yes, Amma, he was." "He loved being a soldier," she continued. "He never complained, he was respected by everyone, he was brave." For a while, she simply looked into the fire. Then, without taking her eyes away from the flames, she spoke again.

"Saab, tell me honestly." There was another pause. "Did my son suffer?" The question hung in the room. Three years. For three years, she had carried that single question. Official letters had not answered it. The Army's condolences had not answered it. The medals had not answered it. Only one man sitting in that room could, I moved closer to her. "No, Amma," I said softly. "He did not suffer. He died as a Gorkha soldier would have wished to die." She nodded gently and turned towards me. I could see that she wanted the truth. No comfort. The truth.

I took a deep breath. "Chattr was part of an operation in Kashmir. We had information that a Pakistani terrorist was hiding in dense forest. Our boys closed in. The terrorist tried to break through

#COMMAND



the cordon. Chattr saw him. And without thinking of his own safety, he chased him."

I stopped for a moment. The fire crackled softly. "He could have waited. He could have stayed under cover. But that was not Chattr. He pursued him...fearlessly. The terrorist fired. Chattr was hit. "I felt the familiar heaviness that returns whenever one remembers a fallen soldier. "He fell while doing exactly what he believed was his duty." There was complete silence. Then, I continued. "The terrorist escaped that day." I saw her lower her head. "But only for a short while. Our battalion continued the operation. We tracked him. And we killed him." Justice in war is never complete. It cannot restore a life. But it matters.

She remained silent for a long time. Finally she asked almost in a whisper, "So...my son did not run away?" I looked directly at her. "No, Amma. He ran towards danger. He died chasing the enemy. He died with great courage. He brought honour to you." Her hands tightened around the photograph. A single tear rolled slowly down her weathered cheek. She did not wipe it away. Then, with remarkable composure, she said something I have never forgotten. "I gave him to the Indian Army. The Indian Army made him a good man." Not a brave man. Not a hero. A good

man. Those words struck me more deeply than anything else she had said. For that is what every regiment hopes to achieve. Not merely to produce courageous soldiers. But to produce good men.

Amma carefully returned the photograph to the trunk. She folded Chattr's uniform with the same care that she must once have folded his clothes before he left for recruitment. Nothing had changed. Except that now she folded memories instead of laundry. Before closing the lid, she rested her hand upon the beret for a few seconds almost as though blessing it. Then, she locked the trunk once again. The key disappeared back into the corner of her shawl. Outside, the wind sighed through the pine trees. Inside that little house in HATHUA, I realised that the Army had sent a notification of death. It had provided financial assistance. It had honoured Chattr with military dignity. But none of those things had answered the question that had

haunted his mother every single day since December 2001. Sometimes, the last duty of a commanding officer is simply to bring peace to a mother's heart. That night, long after Amma had fallen asleep, I remained awake beside the dying embers of the fire. I thought about Chattr. I thought about the hundreds of young soldiers I had commanded. And I silently promised myself that whenever duty or destiny allowed, I would seek out the families of those who had served under me. Not because regulations required it. But because command does not end when the firing stops. Sometimes, that is precisely where it begins.

The Farewell

I slept little that night. The fire had long since died, but the smell of wood smoke lingered in the little house. From somewhere beyond the hills came the distant bark of a dog, followed by silence so complete that I could hear the Arun River far below, flowing steadily through the valley as it had for centuries. There are nights in a soldier's life that remain forever. This was one of them.

Before dawn, I heard a movement outside. Amma was already awake. When I stepped into the courtyard, the eastern sky was beginning to glow faintly behind the distant Himalayan peaks. Frost covered the terraces like a thin white blanket. Every blade of grass sparkled in the first light of morning. The air was so cold that each breath emerged in little clouds before disappearing into the stillness. Her shawl wrapped tightly around her shoulders, Amma was feeding the pig before absentmindedly scattering a little grain for the hen that no longer greeted visitors. Looking at the empty corner of the courtyard, I was reminded once again of the price she had paid simply to honour the memory of her son. She smiled when she saw me. "Saab," she said, "your tea is ready."

We sat together outside the house, warming our hands around small brass cups of tea. Neither of us spoke very much. We no longer needed to. The mountains have a way of teaching silence. Soon, it was time to leave. The long walk back to Dhankutta lay ahead, followed by the drive to Dharan and eventually Kathmandu. Official duties would resume. Files would accumulate on my desk. Meetings would fill the days.

But for those few moments, none of that seemed important. The villagers had gathered quietly in the courtyard. Word had spread that Chattr's Commanding Officer was leaving. There were no speeches. No formal farewells. Only warm smiles, folded hands, and simple good wishes. Amma disappeared into the house for a few moments. When she emerged, she carried a small brass plate. Upon it lay a little vermilion powder, a few grains of rice, and fresh flowers gathered before sunrise. Without a word, she stood before me. I instinctively bowed my head. With hands that trembled slightly from age, she placed a tikka on my forehead. The rice clung to the red mark. Then, she looked directly into my eyes. There was neither sadness nor self-pity on her face. Only the quiet strength that I had come to admire. Very softly she said, "Saab, I had only one son." Her voice faltered. For a moment, she looked towards the mountains. Then, she continued, "God took him away." She reached out and held both my hands in hers. Her palms were rough from a lifetime of working the hills. "Today, when you leave this house, I shall again have one son. You must come whenever you can."

For several moments, I could not speak. In all my years in uniform, in war, in peace, in command and in diplomacy, I cannot recall another moment that humbled me more. I bent down and touched her feet. She tried, as she had done the previous afternoon, to prevent me. "No, Saab, no..." But I persisted. She placed both her hands gently upon my head and blessed me once again. In that instant, I no longer felt like a visiting officer or the Defence Attaché. I felt like Chattr's elder brother returning home. As I began walking down the mountain path, I turned once to look back. Amma was still standing exactly where I had left her, one hand raised in blessing, watching until I was out of sight. I never saw her again, yet

not a single year has passed without my thinking of that winter morning in HATHUA.

People often ask soldiers whether they remember the battles they fought. Of course, we do. We remember the gunfire. We remember the fear. We remember the men we lost. But as the years pass, those memories slowly become quieter. What remains vivid are the people. Whenever I think of Rifleman Chattr Bahadur Rai, I no longer see the forests of Kashmir where he laid down his life while courageously pursuing a terrorist. I see instead a lonely figure wrapped in a grey shawl, standing outside a modest thatched house in the hills of Bhojpur, watching her son's Commanding Officer disappear down a mountain path. That journey taught me something no military academy, staff college, or command appointment ever could. Command is often described in terms of authority, responsibility, and decision-making. In HATHUA, I learnt that command is something much deeper. It is a covenant. When a young man joins a battalion, he entrusts his life to his commanding officer. His family entrusts something even more precious, their faith. If fate allows him to return, that trust is rewarded. If he falls, that trust does not end with the funeral, the bugle or the folded Tricolour. It becomes the Commanding Officer's to carry long after the last shot has been fired, long after the medals have been presented, long after the world has moved on.

As I descended towards the Arun River that morning, I realised that I had gone to HATHUA believing I was paying a debt to one of my soldiers. I returned with the knowledge that I had been given a gift far greater. Meeting Chattr's mother had reminded me that the true strength of a regiment is measured not by the battles it wins, but by the bonds it refuses to break. That winter morning, in a tiny thatched house in the hills of eastern Nepal, an old mother gave me the greatest honour of my military life. She called me her son.

Concluded.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

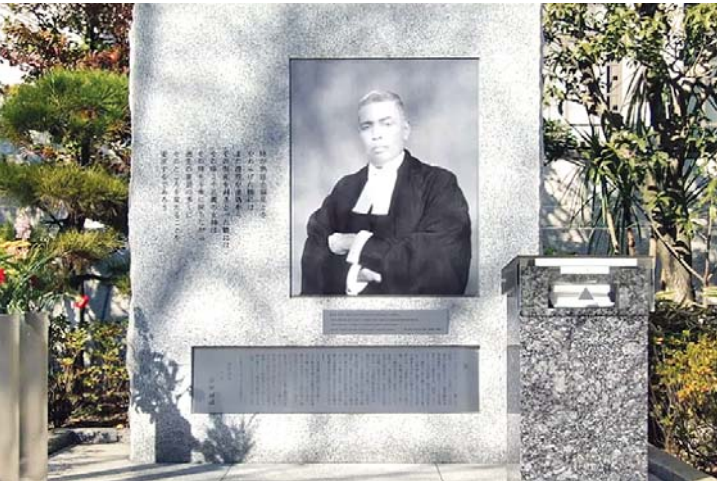


#JUSTICE RADHABINOD PAL

The Indian Judge Honored in Japan

There is a famous sentiment often repeated in Japan: "Learn gratitude from a Japanese, and courage from an Indian."

In Tokyo, there stands a monument dedicated to an Indian judge, a rare tribute from one nation to a foreign jurist. For many Japanese people, this monument symbolizes courage, fairness, and moral independence. The judge was Radhabinod Pal, and his name continues to command deep respect in Japan decades after the end of the Second World War. There is a famous sentiment often repeated in Japan: "Learn gratitude from a Japanese, and courage from an Indian." For many, Justice Pal embodied that courage.



The Trials After World War II

After World War II ended in 1945, Japan was defeated. The Allied powers, the nations that had won the war, established the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) in Tokyo. Its purpose was to prosecute Japanese political and military leaders for war crimes, especially for "crimes against peace" and aggressive warfare.

Eleven judges from victorious Allied nations were appointed to hear the case. India, though still under British rule at the time, sent Justice Radhabinod Pal from the Calcutta High Court as its representative.

The Lone Dissenting Voice

Among the eleven judges, ten voted to convict the Japanese leaders. Only Justice Pal dissented. He wrote an extraordinary dissenting judgment running over 1,200 pages. In it, he argued that all the accused should be found not guilty of the specific charge of "conspiracy to wage aggressive war."

Justice Pal did not deny that terrible atrocities had occurred during the war. He acknowledged events such as the Nanjing Massacre and recognized the suffering caused by

physically, politically, and psychologically. The country faced occupation, shame, and international condemnation. In that atmosphere, Justice Pal's dissent became deeply meaningful to many Japanese citizens.

Questioning the Atomic Bombings

Justice Pal also became one of the rare legal voices of his era to openly suggest that if "crimes against humanity" were to be the standard, then the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki should also be morally and legally examined.

At a time when much of the world viewed Japan only through the lens of wartime aggression, Pal's opinion introduced a more complex discussion about victor's justice, morality in war, and the responsibility of all powerful nations.

Why Japan Remembers Him

Postwar Japan was devastated,

the entire world moved in one direction, an Indian judge chose to follow his conscience and legal reasoning instead of political pressure. That is why, even today, Japan remembers him with gratitude, and his story continues to resonate across generations.

While the world largely portrayed Japan as uniquely guilty, an Indian judge publicly argued that the legal process itself was politically influenced. To many in Japan, this was not merely a legal opinion; it was an act of intellectual independence and humanity. Because of this, Justice Pal earned immense respect in Japan. He was later honored by the Japanese Emperor with one of Japan's highest decorations. A memorial dedicated to him exists at Yasukuni Shrine, where his memory continues to be honored.

Continuing Respect from Japan

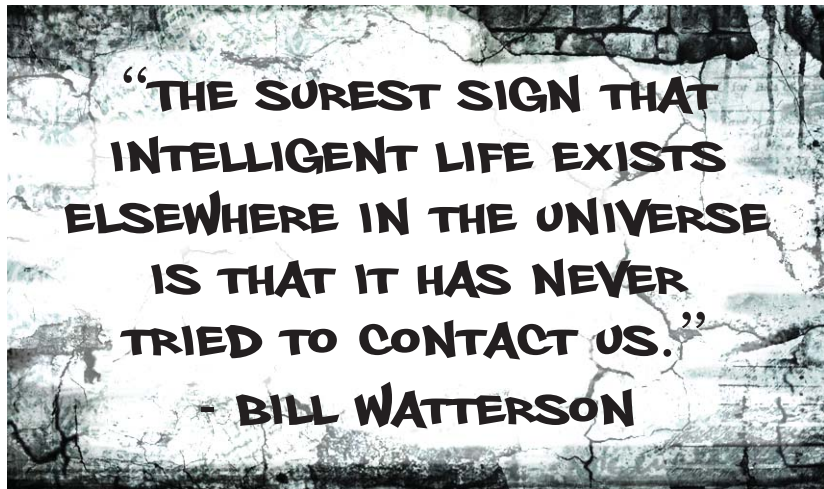
The admiration for Justice Pal did not disappear with time. In 2007, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited India and made a special trip to Kolkata to meet Justice Pal's son, Prasanta Pal. The gesture reflected the continuing gratitude many Japanese people feel towards the Indian jurist.

A Symbol of Independent Thought

Justice Radhabinod Pal remains a complex and debated historical figure. Some critics argue that his judgment overlooked aspects of Japanese militarism, while supporters view him as a defender of consistent international law and anti-colonial thinking. Yet, regardless of political interpretation, his courage to stand alone among eleven judges remains extraordinary. At a moment when the entire world moved in one direction, an Indian judge chose to follow his conscience and legal reasoning instead of political pressure. That is why, even today, Japan remembers him with gratitude, and his story continues to resonate across generations.



THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman