

Recommendation for Baxter Award

Dr S.Y. Quraishi, Former Chief Election Commissioner, India

Impact on the field of Election Administration:

Dr. SY Quraishi is one of the stalwarts of election administration in the world.

By his brilliant handling of the election process of the world's largest democracy, he set up an example for all the emerging democracies particularly of South Asia. His bold initiatives and reforms of the electoral process and administration are already a legend in the region.

His relentless campaign against the abuse of money power in the elections bring a ray of hope to other countries struggling with the same issue. He set up a regulatory mechanism, including a full-fledged division, to monitor and control election funding and expenditure that proved very effective and an example for us. Even Nepal learnt a lot from him and is looking at adopting the idea. He set up a Voter Education Division that has created a veritable participation revolution, another area which the neighbouring countries including Nepal are trying to emulate.

I happened to read his book—“An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Elections” soon after our own Constituent Assembly Election, 2013 in Nepal and my

first reaction to it was to hide it! I have been guilty of deliberately placing books in the wrong place in library so no one else would borrow before I did next time. So I did not share it with my colleagues for some months because I didn't want to share the treasure! I have been referring to this book time and again, sometimes for reference, sometimes to guide, sometimes only to draw the spirit.

Focus on Local Ownership: His concept and creation of the National Voters Day in Delhi which I and many Election Commissioners of the world attended several times is another inspiring initiative known for its simplicity and cost-effectiveness. This helped enormously to take Indian democracy to the roots with enthusiastic participation of the citizens especially the youth - men and women. I have seen firsthand, how proud and enthusiastic Indian youth is about voting during their elections. Over just five years, nearly 120 million voters were added and they were all administered a pledge to vote without fail and honestly. This worked a lot to engage key stakeholders to promote local ownership while improving the quality of democracy at the grassroots. This societal engagement, people-friendliness and openness of the Commission is something to emulate for other South Asian EMBs that how a traditional and conservative organization deepened its people engagement. It makes me think of Dr. Quraishi as a turnaround artiste.

Sustained Dedication: Dr Quraishi continued to dedicate himself to the cause of democracy with greater enthusiasm even after finishing his tenure at the top job. His book 'An Undocumented Wonder - the Making of the Great Indian Election' is a virtual Bible of election management which is inspiring and guiding election managers in many countries especially in South Asia. He is now a popular speaker and resource person at various conferences and training programs worldwide and a very logical and vocal advocate of democracy.

Progress of Election Administration, positive influence: He set up a training and resource center called India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) which has not only improved the quality and efficiency of election managers not only in India but in other countries as well. Scores of election officials from Nepal have benefitted from the training imparted there. Inspired by his example, the 5th Meeting of Forum of Election Management Bodies of South Asia has decided to set up South Asian Institute of Electoral Studies (SAIDES) in Kathmandu to cater to the entire South Asia region. His dedication, leadership and vision has earned him both national and international recognition. He is just as well acknowledged and respected in Nepal as much as in India. No wonder that he has been recognized as one of the most powerful Indians between 2009 and 2014 by various national news magazine, polls and television channels.

Alignment with IFES Mission: A great believer in building cooperation and partnerships, he opened the doors of Election Commission of India to other countries of the world. We understand it was Dr. Quraishi who established a partnership with IFES to improve the quality of democracy not just in India but the region. He is a sought after figure in the Election Commissions of the region to share his knowledge and expertise with the election administrators. Nepal has benefitted a lot from his expert advice and words of experience like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and SriLanka, among others. As a Member of the Board of Advisors of International IDEA (Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance), Stockholm since December 2012, he is sharing his immense knowledge and experience worldwide.

Election Commissioners of Nepal have attended several events where he shared his insights with experts. His Keynote Address at GEO 13, at Incheon, S. Korea. (Oct 2013), the Keynote Address at the Global Conference on Electoral Risk Management, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (Dec 2015) and at the South Asia Regional Conference ‘on the use of money in politics and its effect on people’s representation’ in New Delhi (15-16th Dec, 2015) made an enormous impact and we often talk about him and quote him at the Election Commission of Nepal.

The reasons listed above are by no means exhaustive that leads me to think of Dr. Quraishi as the most inspiring

figure I have come across in the field of elections. So I have no hesitation in recommending Dr SYQuraishi as the most eminently suitable candidate for the Joe C. Baxter Award.