



Text of PM's address via video conference, at the "47th Thuglak Anniversary – A Tribute to Shri Cho Ramaswamy", at Chennai

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Dear Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam ji,

Shri N. Ravi,

Shri G. Viswanathan,

Shri S. Rajnikanth,

Shri Gurumurthy,

Readers of Thuglak

Admirers of late Shri. Cho Ramaswamy

And the people of Tamil Nadu.

Vanakkam. Iniya Pongal nalvazhthukkal

We have gathered at a very auspicious time.

Yesterday my Telugu sisters and brothers celebrated the festival of Bhogi.

Friends in the northern part of India, especially Punjab marked Lohri.

Today is Makar Sankranti.

In Gujarat, the sky is fully of kites on this day, which is also known as Uttarayan.

The people of Assam are celebrating Magh Bihu.

And in Tamil Nadu, where you are, it is Pongal.

Pongal is the festival of thankfulness - thanking the sun god, thanking the animals that help in agriculture and thanking nature for providing the natural resources that sustain us.

Harmony with nature is the strength of our culture, our traditions.

From north to south, east to west, we can see how there is a festive spirit across the nation.

Festivals are celebrations of life.

With festivals comes a spirit of togetherness.

They weave a beautiful thread of unity.

My greetings to people across India on all these festivals.

Makar Sankranti marks the transition of the Sun into the zodiac sign of Makara Rashi on its celestial path. For most people, Makar Sankranti means a break from the harrowing winter and warmer, brighter days.

Some of the festivals we celebrate today are harvest festivals.

We pray that these festivals bring prosperity and joy in the lives of our farmers, who work hard to keep our nation fed.

Friends.

I wish I could be present with you in person – but the exigencies of work did not so permit. I pay my tribute to my dear friend Sri Cho Ramaswamy on the 47th anniversary of Thuglak.

In the passing away of Cho, we all have lost a friend who offered his invaluable wisdom to whoever came his way.

I knew him personally for over four decades. It is a personal loss for me.

He was one of the most multi-faceted personalities I have ever come across. He was an actor, a director, a journalist, an editor, a writer, a playwright, a politician, a political commentator, a cultural critic, a highly talented writer, a religious and social critic, a lawyer and so much more.

Of all his roles, his role as the editor of the Thuglak magazine was the jewel in the crown. For 47 years the Thuglak magazine played a stellar role in the cause of safeguarding democratic values and national interest.

Thuglak and Cho – it is difficult to imagine one without the other. For nearly five decades, he was in charge of Thuglak. If someone has to write the political history of India, he cannot write it without including Cho Ramaswamy and his political commentary.

It is easy to admire Cho, but it is not very easy to understand Cho. To understand him, one needs to understand his courage, conviction, his sense of nationalism which went beyond parochial, regional, linguistic and other divisions.

His greatest achievement is that he made Thuglak a weapon against all divisive forces. He was fighting for a clean and non-corrupt political system. In that struggle, he never spared anyone.

He was critical of those people with whom he had acted for decades, critical of those people who were friends with him for decades, critical of those people who considered him as his mentor. No one was spared. He did not look at the personalities but looked at the issues.

The Nation was his central message. This is reflected in his writings, in the movies, plays and television serials he directed, in the movies for which he wrote the screenplay.

His satire made his criticism loveable even to those he criticized. That is a not a cultivated or cultivable virtue. That was a gift from the divine to him, which he used only to promote public interest. It was his gift also to communicate ideas in one cartoon or in one sentence which a book or volumes of books could not.

This reminds me of a cartoon by Cho wherein people are targeting me with their guns and the common people are standing in front of me; Cho asks who is the real target? Me or the common people? How apt is the cartoon in today's context!

I am reminded of one incident related to Cho. Once some people annoyed with Cho started pelting eggs. On this Cho said "Aiyya, why throw raw eggs at me when you can make me an omelette." The pelters started laughing. He had this incredible ability to mould conditions in his favour.

Thuglak was a platform for all. Cho would carry views contrary, even hostile to him, and even abusive of him in his own magazine. This made no one excluded in Thuglak. Even those he criticized would find their views carried with the same prominence as Cho's in Thuglak. This is the truest democratic spirit in media and in public life.

In my opinion, his thought and contributions were not merely limited to Tamil milieu and Tamil people. He inspired many generations of aspiring journalists and politicians spanning many societies in India.

And all of us know that Thuglak magazine was not a mere political commentary. It was the ears and eyes of millions of Tamil people. Cho, through Thuglak, was the connecting bridge between masses and rulers.

I am glad that Thuglak will continue its journey in objective journalism as envisaged by Cho. Those who have inherited the legacy of Thuglak have great responsibility on their shoulders. To be guided by Cho's vision and commitment will be a big challenge. Adherence to this vision will be a great service to the people of Tamil Nadu.

I wish Mr. Gurumurthy and his team all the very best in this endeavour. Knowing Gurumurthy ji, I am confident that he will be successful.

That Cho had mastered the art of satire, humour and irony need not be overstated.

I think we need more satire and humour. Humour brings happiness in our lives. Humour is the best healer.

The power of a smile or the power of laughter is more than the power of abuse or any other weapon. Humour builds bridges instead of breaking them.

And this is exactly what we require today- building bridges. Bridges between people.

Bridges between communities. Bridges between societies.

Humour brings out human creativity. We are living in an age where one speech or one event can create multiple memes, forwards.

Friends

I have participated in Thuglak's annual readers' meet before, in person in Chennai.

Since you have a tradition at this event to play verses from the Shrimad Bhagwad Gita in Mr. Cho's voice, let me end with a Shlok in Mr. Cho's honour:

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।

तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णान्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ।

(The eternal does not move from place to place, but moves from one abode to another.)

Let us, together thank him for his contribution to the multiple fields he touched. Above all let us thank him for being the great Cho Ramaswamy - the one and only Cho.

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