

## **India: Organic intellectual - Praful Bidwai (1949-2015)**

Thursday 9 July 2015, by [JAYAPRAKASH N. D.](#) (Date first published: 2 July 2015).

**Activist, humanist, pacifist, journalist, columnist, uncompromising secularist, Praful Bidwai (1949-2015) was passionate about his quest for justice and equality.**

Praful Bidwai was born in the town of Dewas in Madhya Pradesh. His parents, who had hailed from Amravati in the Vidharba region of Maharashtra, settled down in Nagpur. Praful had two younger sisters. His father was Head of the Department and Professor of Geography at the Government College, Nagpur. After completing his schooling, Praful pursued his Pre-University Course at the Science College, Nagpur. Since he emerged as one of the top-ranking students there, he succeeded in securing admission to the electrical engineering course at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay in 1966.

According to Suhas Paranjape, who was Praful's room-mate at that time, it was during his sojourn at IIT that he was radicalised through his interactions with a progressive group on the campus (with Kumar Ketkar, Sudhir Bedekar, Suhas Paranjape and others as members).

Javed Alam, who was Praful's course mate and who too became a journalist later on, says he is indebted to Praful for prodding him to join the progressive group. Suresh Khairnar, one of Praful's friends in Nagpur, recalls that Praful considered Kumar Ketkar (currently Chief Editor of *Dainik Divya Marathi*), who was then working in the Computer Science & Engineering Department at IIT Bombay, as one of his earliest mentors.

It is interesting to note that this progressive group in IIT Bombay was formed under the influence of the institution's alumni who had emigrated to the United States and Europe and who in turn were influenced by the radical movements that were emerging in those regions, especially in the late 1960s. The impact of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the movements initiated by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the U.S. and by their counterparts in Britain, France, Germany and elsewhere in Europe was felt in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Students across the world sought not only educational reforms but also raised their voices against all kinds of injustices and inequality in society. They opposed all forms of colonialism and imperialism; they felt outraged by the continuance of Apartheid, Zionism and the U.S. war in Vietnam; they called for the elimination of nuclear weapons and drastic reduction in all other types of weapons and weapon systems. They also supported the adoption of confidence-building measures between peoples and nations and the bridging of the gap between developed and developing nations on the one hand, and between the poor and the rich on the other.

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