

Manifestos and the Military—A Talk on National Security

Professors, students, homemakers and ex-servicemen, flocked to Country Inn on the 14th of April to attend a talk on national security. The event, which was hosted by Udupi Talks, brought in Rajeev Chandrasekhar, a Member of Parliament and an MIT alumnus, and Major Surendra Poonia, a retired special forces operative and an internationally accomplished athlete to serve as the event's main speakers.



Raghubati Bhat, Udupi's representative in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, handing over a bouquet to Major Surendra Poonia.

The ceremony started with the lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries in attendance. Rajeev Chandrasekhar was then introduced, and his achievements were read out for the benefit of the ones attending the talk. Chandrasekhar started his talk by asking the audience two things, one regarding how many of them wished for India to become a truly global economy, and the other was about how many of them felt proud to be an Indian. The questions were quite rhetoric in nature, and such

questions and statements were made throughout the remainder of the event to capture the audience's attention.

Moving on, the Member of Parliament described his contributions to the nation. As the son of an Air Force officer, he talked about how he has taken every initiative necessary to support the men in uniform, whether it be setting up a National War Memorial for the brave martyrs or formulating the One Rank, One Pension scheme for retired servicemen. He talked about how when he had approached the then-Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh about building a war memorial in the capital, the PM responded negatively by stating how it would spoil the landscape of the India Gate area. The MP continued making slight jabs at the expense of Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi throughout his speech and also referred to him as "a 49-year-old who calls himself young". Focusing on the nepotism prevalent in Congress since its inception, he called for an end to dynasty-politics.

Contrasting this with the way Narendra Modi works, Chandrasekhar argued that our present Prime Minister works for the country, unlike Rahul Gandhi. Ridiculing the Congress manifesto, which calls for a review of the AFSPA and removal of the anti-sedition law, he stated that they were not going to indulge in any talks. He went on to draw attention to the party's history of using 'strategic-restraint' countless times, calling it an act of sheer cowardice. The extensive introduction at times felt like a BJP campaign, and the MP concluded by emphasising that the rival party has never kept its promises in the past.

Major Poonia then took to the stage and accepted that Rajeev Chandrasekhar had already spoken about everything related to national security. The multi-sport athlete re-emphasised how the family politics of the Gandhi/Nehru family would come to an end. With his use of the phrase "*hamari party jab waapis aayegi*" (when our party comes back), the Major was confident that the Congress had no chance of winning this election.

Further mockery of the Gandhi family ensued with Rahul's antics being recalled. Jokingly, he exclaimed how the term "*Bharat Mata*" was taken literally and how he would be okay with "*Bharat Abbu*" too.



In the final segment of the event, audience questions were answered by the dignitaries. When asked why there was no singular identity card for Indians, Chandrasekhar was quick to mention how ex- Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani was the one who had laid the foundation for what is now known as the Aadhar Card. Some questions were left out due to time constraints, one of them being what they thought about the politicising of the military. Perhaps at an event that seemingly was doing just that, that question might not have been the easiest to answer.

The invigorating and interesting evening saw an ample amount of discussion regarding national security, but whether all sides of the matter were discussed is a different issue. Undoubtedly the speakers had enough experience in the field of national security and were more than qualified to speak about it, but the event at its core was a political one with an agenda.