

OBITUARIES

Prof. I. P. Singh
(20-02-1928 to 27-09-2016)

Prof. Indera Pal Singh, who passed away recently, was one of the most noticeable anthropologists of the country. He belonged to an era when anthropology as a subject was beginning to take shape in India. He was from the second batch of master's students from Delhi University passing his masters in Anthropology in the year 1950. Born in Amritsar in Punjab on 20th of February, 1928, he did his schooling with Matric from Ramjas School and I.Sc. from Hindu College in Delhi. He went to Amritsar to do his graduation in Botany and Chemistry from the famous Khalsa College. After graduation, he came back to Delhi University to do his masters in anthropology. While he was doing masters, he also cleared certificate course in Russian language. After his masters, he was the first student from the Department of Anthropology to go for advance training in Anthropology from the Franz Weidenreich Anthropologische Institute, Frankfurt, Germany. This training in Germany had a profound impact on his approach towards research. In fact, he became the first one to successfully defend the doctoral thesis from the department as many research students before him were not able to successfully defend their theses.

He succeeded Prof. P. C. Biswas as Head of the Department of Anthropology and was the HOD from 1968 to 1979 and 1981 to 1984. In University of Delhi, he was also perhaps the longest serving Proctor as well. Prof. I. P. Singh was basically a network person who believed in building and nurturing social relations with academicians world over. During his active days in the department, he would make sure that any anthropologist coming to Delhi would give a lecture in the department. This was also true of the Indian anthropologists visiting the department. As students and later research scholars, we heard many famous anthropologists giving lectures on the area of their expertise in our seminar room. Once, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata organized an International Conference. On learning about it, Prof. Singh at once wrote to K. C. Malhotra to inform him about who all were coming to attend this conference. He then wrote a separate letter to all foreign scholars to pay a visit to the department while they were at Delhi and give lecture to the students.

The idea of inviting visiting scholars was not for any personal benefit but to provide research students an opportunity to expand horizons. I would narrate one of my own experiences. It was in early eighties, when George M.

Foster had paid a visit to India. He was affiliated to SEARO office of WHO. Foster was to be facilitated in India International Centre and Prof. I. P. Singh was to introduce him there. Knowing that, I was working in the field of medical anthropology and Foster also had an expertise in the same area, he asked me to go to WHO office and meet Foster to collect a brief account on his professional life so that Prof. Singh could introduce him in the IIC function. My meeting with Foster was a boon for me as he not only advised me on my research but gave me many valuable reprints. This was quite a routine thing for him and many students were immensely benefited by such contacts.

While Prof. Singh was a hard core physical anthropologist, he had very special ability to observe minutest details as a true ethnographer. In his re-study of Daleke which he had recently completed, he would describe the process of change by telling how the things were while he had studied the village in the early 1950s. In fact, it was his enthusiasm and zeal in doing this re-study that I was inspired to re-visit the well studied North India village Rampura, studied in the early fifties by Oscar Lewis. I had many intense discussions with Prof. Singh as he was part of the research team that had assisted Oscar Lewis in this Delhi village study. While visiting Rampura, we learnt that Prof. Singh continues to maintain very cordial relations with the villagers. Honouring his zeal in doing re-study, I requested Prof. V. K. Srivastava, our HOD, to have special seminar on re-study which he readily agreed. This seminar was a tribute to Prof. Singh's enthusiasm and dedication. With appropriate photographs, depicting then and now, Prof. Singh explained the process and direction of change in this Sikh village.

As a teacher, he was one of the most sincere and serious mentor to his students. He would generally keep his classes in the morning hours, as being DU administrator; he was required to participate in university meetings. He was so punctual that he would be the first person to reach the department. His classes would be the place where he would speak about the experience that he had gained during his academic and professional life. His favorite subject for teaching was history of anthropology.

Prof. Singh was very fond of organizing seminars and conferences in the department. He was especially skilled in summarizing the deliberations. One would quite often see him sitting almost with a blank face during the seminar but when he would be asked to summarize, he would come out with very fine summarization. His memory was very sharp and his comments were always full of anecdotes about his rich field experiences. He was very well known outside the anthropology fraternity. He collaborated with AIIMS, DRDO, UNECSO, WHO and many more national and international organizations. During the organization of the International Conference of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in 1978, Prof. I. P. Singh played a very important role along with Prof. L. P. Vitharthi. He hosted the delegates

for one evening tea which was a huge gathering held in the Mughal Garden of the University of Delhi facing the Department of Anthropology.

As a person Prof. I. P. Singh was a very kind hearted one. He was fondly known in the university circles as Monga sahib. Actually his full name was Indera Pal Singh Monga but he preferred to be called I. P. Singh. As a powerful university administrator, he was instrumental in giving jobs to a large number of non-teaching employees in various departments, offices and hostels. He would go out of his ways to help students and the staff of the university. He was also known as a very honest person. He would not accept any gift or sweets from the people. He once politely refused to accept a costly gift sent to him on occasion of New Year by a supplier. On returning the gift, Prof. Singh wrote a very polite letter thanking the person but declining to accept the gift.

Although, he had retired in 1993, his passing away was sad news not only for us in the department but to many others in the university who had directly or indirectly benefited from his kindness. If Prof. P. C. Biswas had founded the department, then Prof. I.P. Singh had nurtured and built the department by placing it at par with the other illustrious science department of the University of Delhi. Many states of the art laboratories of the department are a testimony to his singly handed devotion and zeal. The Department of Anthropology will always be indebted to Prof. Indera Pal Singh for his services.

P. C. Joshi
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi

R. S. Negi
(12-7-1932 – 16-10-2016)

Prof. Raghunath Singh Negi passed away on 16th of October in Dehradun. He was 84 years old when he died. Prof. Negi started his career after masters from Lucknow University. His photograph as a young student can still be seen on the walls of the office of the Anthropology Department of Lucknow University. He was a young adventurous energetic person coming from Pauri Garhwal to pursue higher studies in Lucknow. His fascination for visiting new and remote areas took him to the study of Bastar tribals, among whom he became very popular. In his memoir, he has written about his rapport with the Bastar tribals which greatly impressed Prof. N. K. Bose when he visited these areas as Head of Anthropology Department, Government of India.

In his early career, he was instrumental in taking the Government of India expedition under the leadership of N. Dutta Majumdar to Rupkund and bringing back a large number of skeletal remains including a part of the body with flesh (torso) from the lake to the collection of the Anthropological Survey of India. It was an extremely arduous task as there was very poor road connectivity at that time and the skeletal material was extremely fragile and decomposable with the bones having flesh and skin on them. He was not only successful in transporting this precious material but also did much scientific experimentation on these bones to ascertain their ethnic identity. His paper titled "Determination of A and B Blood group specific substance in the Rupkund Human Body Remains" was published by the Government of India.

His researches in the Bastar region mainly focused upon serological aspects including many landmark studies on Sickle-cell trait. Besides Bulletin of the Anthropological Survey of India, his papers appeared in Man as well. He served in many stations of the Anthropological Survey of India. I had met him for the first time in Dehradun when he was the Office In-charge at Hardwar Road office of the Anthropological Survey of India. I had passed my masters and had come to appear in an interview for a position of fellowship in Anthropological Survey of India. Prof. Negi interviewed me along with Dr. M. K. Raha. In my interactions, I found him to be a very friendly and encouraging person. He was a man without any pretensions, and although there was much difference in our age and experience, he never let me feel the difference and interacted as if we were colleagues. He selected me but I could not join Dehradun as I had got a fellowship in Delhi University. Then after, I would often see him in conferences where he would have his own style of interjecting in the conference presentations. His interjections, particularly if the paper is on a problem related to hills or physical anthropology, would be very mature and pointed.

From Anthropological Survey of India he joined Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya as its founder director. This was a very

challenging task as he was a physical anthropologist by training, but, the Lucknow training and especially the holistic perspective of anthropology came handy in his efforts of building this unique museum almost from the start. It was a gigantic task as this museum had to showcase the living cultural heritage of India. Brick by brick, he visualized and built the museum which is now a memorable institution for the posterity.

After a highly successful stint at the IGRMS, he joined the Department of Anthropology, H.N.B. Garhwal University, Srinagar as a professor and head. When he joined the department, it was already running masters and doctoral programme and his joining of the department provided necessary impetus to its growth. For few years that he was a professor in Garhwal, I was a reader with him and had the opportunity to gain from his immense experience in the field of anthropology. He revitalized the teaching and research of anthropology in this department. He also guided few research students for their doctorate in Garhwal.

While most of his fieldwork was in central India, his knowledge of the Himalayan indigenous communities was quite good. He was particularly fascinated by the Van Gujjar community of transhumance buffalo herders. A true believer in the pluralistic composition of India, he saw Himalaya as a melting pot of multiple cultures coming and dissolving giving rise to a unique blend of contemporary Himalayas. He would view Himalayan cultural heritage as very closely linked to the specific ecosystem of the mountains. While appreciative of the technological advancements in the Himalayas, he was against copying the practices of the plains. He once explained to me what he meant by the specific situation of the mountain communities? He said that to a child belonging to the Himalayas, the statement “the rising sun is red” would be out of place as in the Himalayas, the sun rises above the hills and therefore is never red.

At personal level, he remained a very humble and simple person who never boasted of his abilities, achievements or status. At the same time, he was very sharp and mature intellectual who was well versed with the biological and cultural diversity of India. As a true Garhwali, he also served the defense services as an officer with the Territorial Army. He participated in the famous Indo-Pakistan war of 1971. He accompanied the Pakistani POWs from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to the west. His son is continuing with the family tradition of serving the army. Prof. R. S. Negi served anthropology and Indian Army to the best of his capabilities. The anthropology fraternity will miss him for his smile and characteristic woolen cap that he was fond of. His contribution to Himalayan and Bastar anthropology will be cherished by the future generation of anthropologists.

P. C. Joshi

*Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi*