

Obituary - 3



Devinder Singh

(1962 - 2017)

What can one say about a person one has not met, one has not read, yet now feels in debt? What can one say about a person who sends you an email of gratitude and then leaves the world before you can share your thank you. What can one say about a person who holds the promise of being a meaningful geographer yet leaves the land without a promise in hand? What indeed can one say about Devinder, when Destiny has other plans.

Devinder Singh sent me his first email on 17th December 2015. It read:

“Thank you for the great help which I received from your book. Here is the PPT”. (He was referring to my book *Voice and how it had helped him chart what he called the Odesy of National Association of*

Geographers.)The list of acknowledgments in his PPT carries the name of only one book : *Indian Geography, Voice of Concern* author Anu Kapur.

My prompt reply “Thank you ..it is a nice updated ppt ... and is very nice of you to acknowledge me so many times and in so many ways.”

Few geographers in India give credit to works of others, fewer still take the acknowledgment further to reach out to the author. Devinder was among the few.

When his first email arrived I was in the midst of preparing for the book launch of *Made Only in India* and I promptly sent him an invite :” I am releasing my next book on 9th of February 2016 Tuesday evening at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi it would

be very nice if you can come for that or plan accordingly.” Prompt comes his response “.... delighted that a new contribution from you is coming very soon to inspire us all. Would be great if I can make it to the book release function.” But he could not. Destiny had other plans.

Born on 18th November 1962 in Poonch, a town located between the Pir Panjal hills and valleys with the quiet river Pulasti flowing on the left why was Devinder drawn to the study of geography? Was it the inspiration of the land and landscape, was it his penchant for travel and exploration? Did he explore other avenues of profession?

Devinder was awarded the Director Generals Baton of Honour for being the Best All Round Officer Cadet in the Pre Commission Course at Kamptee in 1994. In India, the National Cadet Corps is a voluntary cadet organization for motivating college students to pursue a career in the Indian armed Forces. It aims to develop qualities of character, discipline, teamwork, leadership and adventure in the students. The corps organizes outdoor activities, such as camping, trekking, mountain climbing, besides providing small arms training to cadets. Cadets have no commitment for serving in the armed forces, but are given a preference by the Services Selection Board when applying for officer commissions in the military services. To serve the army could have been one of Devinder’s dream after all his father Shri Niranjana Singh retired as Subedar and could well have instilled in his son the virtues of serving the country through the armed forces. Clearly

Devinder would have been an officer of rank had he joined the forces. Destiny had other plans.

Taking an undergraduate degree from the Government College, Poonch of Jammu and Kashmir State, Devinder pursued a Masters in Geography at the Garhwal University Srinagar, and a Masters of Philosophy in Geography, Panjab University Chandigarh. Barely had he enrolled in a Phd at Panjab University Chandigarh that he got an offer of Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography, Government M.A.M College, Jammu. Serving for a brief tenure of 4 years Devinder shifted base to join the Department of Geography, University of Jammu in the year 1998.

What rooted Devinder to the city of Jammu is not just a secure tenure at one of the prestigious Departments of Geography but also the fact that his home town Poonch is just a drive of only 4 hours by road. Having lost his father in 1996, his deep care for his widowed mother reinforced the factor of proximity.

Poonch remained close to Devinders heart. This is evident from his list of publications which carry titles “The Strategic Border Valley Town of Poonch : A Study of Townscape” or ‘ The Strategic Valley Town of Poonch An Evolutionary Study in its Site and Situation” and ‘House in the Strategic Border Valley: A Case Study of Loran Valley in Poonch District’ among a list of others.

That Devinder bonded with ‘his place’ of work is evident from the keen interest he showed to investigate and research on different aspects of Jammu. His publications

stand evidence and contain the likes of “ Rhythm of Religious life and Sacred Landscape Along Traditional Routes in Jammu Siwalik”, “Human Pressure and Mismanagement of Urban Ecology: A Focus on the Temple City of Jammu”. “The Temple City Jammu: A Brief Evolutionary Profile” “Continuity and Change among Gujjars in Jammu Siwaliks”. Besides publications and seminar presentations even his Monograph submitted to the Ambedkar Centre, Department of Sociology, University of Jammu is on the Urban Social Space and Weaker Sections in Jammu City” The title of the UGC Project that he was pursuing was “Development, Management and Consumption Pattern of water: A Case Study of Jammu city, J&K”.

Kashmir is part and parcel of Jammu. Devinder could not ignore Kashmirs many pressing issues and on his charts are the likes of “Making sense of the disputed identity of geography” “Impact of Kashmiri Pandits on the structure of Jammu City” and “Reproduction of Cultural Landscape in Diasporic Setting: A Case of Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu City”

Like the ripples of a concentric circle Devinders research expanded from Poonch to Jammu to Kashmir, and then to Geography in India. It is his research on the discipline that took him to prepare a PPT on Odyssey of NAGI and thus connect with me. But that was just the beginning of our interlude. Destiny had other plans these I take the liberty to share verbatim:

devinder singh <devinder_jmu@yahoo.co.in> to Anu Kapur, 01/11/16 at 3:07 PM

Dear Professor Anu kapur,

Let me first extend my heartiest greetings to you for giving us an immensely interesting and outstanding work. Fortunately, I got the opportunity to review this rare work of yours. And I must say it has been a wonderful experience going through the book. Regards and wishes Devinder Singh, devinder singh <devinder_jmu@yahoo.co.in> To Anu Kapur 02/11/16 at 5:37 PM

Dear Professor Anu,

I would like to say that your work is a rare piece of scholarship. This book is now a invaluable asset of mine. Well, I have sent this review to the IIG, Pune for its publication in their journal. I wish maximum scholars, particularly geographers to read this outstanding book to get benefited. With this, I once again congratulate you for contributing richly to the field of knowledge. While reading, a thought would often visit me was how much hard work has gone into this work and how gifted is the writer. Hope to see more work like this in future from you. Regards Devinder Singh.

But Devinder was not to see more work either by me or from any of us or even from himself.

Destiny had other plans.

Review of my book Made Only in India, published in IIG, Pune, Volume 39, No. 1, pages - 157 -159, Year ??

Devinder died 30th January 2017.

He did not live to see the publication of the review of Made Only in India in the IIG.

Devinder was Made of Stuff and Substance that was humane.

What can one say for a person who comes into ones life for a brief time and leaves behind a burden of a life time?

I am sad, so sad that I could not share my thanks with Devinder for this kind deed of taking time out to review my book.

My gratitude resonates from the earth to the heavens. Destiny has no other plan.

Anu Kapur

Delhi