



### **Professor Ravi Shankar Singh**

(1970 - 2021)

It is indeed painful to write an obituary of a friend who has been no less than a younger brother. The very thought of not having him at the other end of a phone call sends shivers down the spine. It is difficult to believe that Professor Ravi S Singh is no more with us to share his moments of happiness and sorrow, his enthusiastic responses to the most critical issues confronting the nation, our society, and our discipline, and our profession. The date 21st April 2021 has been a cruel day that snatched away not only my dear friend and lovely brother but also a very promising Geographer and an eminent scholar. It is not only my feeling. I can vouch that anyone who has had the slightest opportunity to interact with him feels the same way. A prolific geographer and a renowned social scientist, Professor Singh, within a short span of time, contributed immensely to the discipline of geography and has left behind him indelible marks of his scholarship that transcends the

narrow confines of academic disciplines. I write these words with a divided heart. I feel proud to present his achievements to the younger generation and for those who might not be aware of his seminal contributions, but mourn his death.

Prof. Ravi Shankar Singh was born on 4th November 1970 in a nondescript village named Mukrera in Saran District of Bihar. He earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and received his M.phil. degree from the Centre for the Study of Regional Development of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi and Ph.D. from J P University, Chhapra. He was the recipient of D.Litt. in the year 2020, only less than a year before his passing away. He happened to be the first in the history of the Geography department in BHU to have been honoured with this degree. As a graduate and post

graduate student at BHU and while pursuing his Mphil programme at JNU, he was well known as an activist-nationalist and culturally awakened person.

He began his teaching career as a lecturer in geography at the Rang-Frah Government Degree College at Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh in the year 1996 and continued up to 2001, and then shifted to teach at Kisan P.G. Degree College at Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh from 2001-2005. In the year 2005, Prof Singh joined his alma mater as a Reader in the Department of Geography, Banaras Hindu University where he was promoted to the position of a Professor from October 2011. He was also appointed as an Adjunct Professor at Bhojpuri Research Centre at Banaras Hindu University. Professor Singh used to recount his early days of teaching in Arunachal Pradesh which according to him was the most fulfilling part of his life. Teaching to students largely drawn from the socially and economically deprived tribal communities in a far-flung mountainous area enriched his understanding of Indian culture deeply rooted in the tribal system of belief and justice. He could go on for hours on the idea of India that rests on inclusiveness, unity and diversity. In over a decade of my association with Prof. Singh, I saw him grow as a serious cultural and social geographer with critical insights into several other branches of geography including but not restricted to fields like geographical thought, social and cultural geography, development geography and geography of education, peri-urban geographies, and qualitative research methods—all illustrated with his innovative research publications appraising critical observations, exemplified with field studies.

Prof. Singh had established himself as an outstanding teacher and popular mentor to his students and known for being extremely caring and intense amongst his students. He was a dedicated teacher, who enjoyed taking students on an intellectual journey. Eight students earned their Ph. D. degrees under his supervision and care. Prof. Singh was a serious researcher and writer too. In a short span of only 25 years of his professional career, he has to his credit over 100 scholarly research articles and review papers and 25 book reviews which found their way into reputed national and international publications, including prestigious research series published from Germany, Sweden, Japan, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom and also, six INSA-Cultural Geography appraisal reviews, twenty-four book reviews, and six popular articles. He has served as a consultant to two major research projects of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

Prof Singh was an original and creative scholar. His contributions to the field of geography earned him much respect and appreciation from the academic community from all over India. Such was his reputation as a prolific speaker that even at a very young age he was one of the most sought after scholars often invited to deliver lectures across the country as chief guest, keynote speaker, lead speaker and resource person in seminars, conferences and other academic programmes. He presented about seventy papers in the national and international seminars held at USA, Sri Lanka, China, Poland, and Nepal. He has the honour of delivering prestigious memorial lectures in the memories of Prof. N. K. Bose, Prof. Enayat Ahmad, Prof. R. N. Dubey; and Foundation Day Lecture in the

Department of Geography, Cotton University, Guwahati, and the lectures in Shastri Series at Gonda, UP and Rajarshi Series in Varanasi.

His contribution to academic extension activities has been no less impressive. He was selected as a research methodology expert on the research pool of ICSSR, New Delhi. He was nominated as a Visitor's Nominee to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He was a member of the Uttarakhand State Higher Education Council and served as the Academic Advisor to the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF). His versatility and expertise in diverse aspects of geography teaching and research made him one of the most sought after scholars of the country to be part of the editorial board of numerous journals published from India and abroad. Many reputed Journals had empanelled him as a reviewer due to his critical bent of mind and concern for quality writing. He was a voracious reader and is fondly remembered by his students and colleagues as a moving library.

At a very young age, Prof. Singh had accumulated great international exposure and delivered invited lectures and presented research findings. He received the 'Enrichment Fund Award' from the Association of American Geographers (USA) in its annual meet held in the year 2011 in Seattle, Washington. He was a special invitee to the SAARC Regional Seminar on "Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Sustainable Development (CHTSD) in South Asia" in 2014, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Chinese Academy of Sciences too invited him to attend an International Workshop on "Geopolitics in Changing Southeast Asia: Boundaries and Borderlands". He was a special invitee at the IGU Regional Congress

on "Changes, Challenges, and Responsibility" held at Kraków, Poland in the year 2014. In this meet, Prof. Singh, together with Prof. Benno Werlen of Germany, had played an active role in the proclamation of the UN International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU), and the formation of a new IGU Commission on this very theme. Prof. Ravi also paid two times visit to the Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu (Nepal), and delivered lectures in the Central Department of Geography.

Prof. Singh's contribution to institution building is enormous. He was a member of as many as 10 professional bodies of geography in the country such as Indian Science Congress Association, National Association of Geographers, India; Institute of Indian Geographers, North East India Geographical Society, Geographical Society of India, National Geographical Society of India, Society of Heritage Planning and Environmental Health where he served as the Secretary and International Research Forum, on SAARC (Tokyo). He served as the Vice-President of the Indian Society of Spatial Science (Kolkata) and as the treasurer of the National Geographical Society of India (2018-2021). His association with the Institute of the Indian geographers (IIG) has been the most memorable. He enthusiastically participated in all the activities of the institute where he served two consecutive terms as a Secretary of the Institute, from 2013 to 2019. A keen participant in all the activities undertaken by the Institute, Prof. Singh had undertaken a difficult project of compiling all the Presidential addresses of the IIG since its inception and had plans to publish it in a book within a year. His untimely death however snatched the promised book away from all of us.

Prof Singh was always full of life and was desperate for change to make geography relevant to the next generation. His desire for a vibrant and far more relevant new geography in the 21st Century can be seen in his edited book “Indian Geography in the 21st Century: The Young Geographers Agenda” published by the Cambridge Scholars and commended by the critics and readers alike. The book is only a sample of his brilliant contribution to the discipline of geography. His other Popular publications are a monograph, entitled ‘Paths of Development in Arunachal Pradesh’ (NBC, New Delhi. 2005) and two edited anthologies on Indian geography: Indian Geography: Perspectives, Concerns and Issues (Rawat Publications, 2009). It is perhaps the first attempt to unfold the record of the major ideas on the nature, content and critical issues in Indian Geography. As an editor, prof. Ravi S. Singh has made a gallant contribution to bring together important pieces of writing on Indian Geography.

I met him on many occasions during the conferences and seminars held at numerous places in India and in many other academic assignments attended by him either in Pune or in Varanasi. As a person, he was always cheerful, charming, humble but argumentative and dynamic. Anyone who has come in contact with him has been mesmerised by his unfailing patience and gentleness as well as his intellect and productivity. He was an eternal optimist. During our last meeting in

Delhi, only a few months before his untimely demise, he spoke eloquently of myriad concerns and challenges facing Geography teaching and research in the 21st century and his visions to make the discipline gain a prominent place among the social science disciplines to serve the peoples’ interest.

Prof. Ravi is survived by his wife, Dr. Pratibha, and the only son Abhisht Adityam. I have met them at his home in Varanasi. He was always a family man; a wonderful friendly father and a caring husband. He was extremely caring and loved his family more than anything and always conceded their support in his achievements.

Prof. Singh was hugely appreciated by his students, colleagues and friends not only as a scholar but also for his kindness, warmth and generosity. He was unfailingly considerate and thoughtful, fostering a culture of mutual respect and support within the department and in the university and colleges and in any other institution he worked with. He nurtured and encouraged many young scholars.

In Prof. Singh, we have lost an inspiring scholar, colleague, and friend, who will be long remembered across the scholarly community. He will be greatly missed.

**Prof. Ravindra G. Jaybhaye**

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