



Professor Ram Babu Singh

(1955 - 2021)

Prof. Ram Babu Singh, distinguished professor of Geography at the University of Delhi (India) and the Secretary-General of the International Geographical Union died on 22 July 2021 after a brief illness. The sad news came as a great shock to the community of geographers of India and beyond, among which Prof. Singh was a household name respected as a visionary, an academic leader and an extraordinary mentor.

Prof. Singh is known to the geographical community as a researcher, scholar, author, and, most importantly, as an institution builder. He was passionate about teaching, and worked tirelessly to transform geography teaching and research in India at a time when the subject was fast losing its pre-eminent status in the country. Nothing, including his deteriorating health, prevented him from his passion to raise the status of Indian geography at the international level.

With a glorious academic record, Prof. R.B. Singh received his education in the prestigious Banaras Hindu University where he completed his post-graduation and PhD. Before joining the University of Delhi, Prof. Singh served as a UGC Research Scientist-B/Reader from 1988 till 1996 and was appointed a full professor in the department of Geography at the premiere Delhi University which he served till his superannuation in the year 2020. He also served the department as its head for two terms during 2013-2016 and 2019-20. He was the coordinator of the UGC-SAP-DRS III- (2014-2019) in the department too.

His contribution to teaching and research in geography was commendable. He was passionate about environmental issues and had a great interest in the application of GIS technology to all his contributions over the last

four decades. He took keen interest in teaching diverse courses to his students who joined him for M.A., M.Phil. and Ph. D. programmes at the University of Delhi. More than 40 scholars received Ph. D. under his care and supervision and 81 students completed their M.Phil under his able guidance. His academic contributions are no less impressive. Pivotal to his remarkable national and international impact he authored and co-authored some 15 books, 41 edited research volumes and published over 247 research papers including 123 of those published in national and international journals of high repute on such diverse journals such as Remote Sensing, Climate Dynamics, Current Science, Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, Energies, Sustainability, Theoretical and Applied Climatology, Environmental Science and Policy, Physical Geography, Advances in Meteorology, Physics and Chemistry of the Earth, Agriculture Ecosystem and Environment, Hydrological Processes, Mountain Research and Development, Journal of Mountain Science, Climate, Frontiers in Environmental Science, Advances in Earth Science, Advances in Limnology, European Journal of Geography, Asian Geographer, Environmental Economics, Cities and Health, Tourism Recreation Research, Journal of the Geological Society of India. He was special series editor of some of the prestigious journals like Sustainability, Advances in Meteorology, Physics and Chemistry of the Earth. He served as the member of the editorial committee in a number of journals, notably the Journal of Mountain Science and the Journal of Disaster Science and Management.

Prof. Singh was a well-known geographer of international repute and travelled all

over the world and firmly established Indian Geography at the international arena providing it the much needed visibility and wider acceptance.

Very few geographers can match the level of achievement recorded by Prof. Singh in such a short time. Throughout his career, professor Singh received many awards, honours, and accolades from national and international professional societies, as well as from the Department, and other universities. Among the many honours he received was his election as the Vice President of the highest world geographical body, International Geographical Union (IGU) since 2012 for two consecutive terms (2016-18). Recently Prof. Singh got elected to the coveted post of the Secretary General and Treasurer of the International Geographical Union for the period 2018-22. He is the first Indian and the second Asian to get elected to this position. He earned the distinction of holding the dual position as the IGU Secretary General (2018-2022) and the ICSU Scientific Committee Member.

He was elected President of the Earth System Science Section of the Indian Science Congress Association for the year 2019-20. In recognition of his great contribution to science, he was awarded with the prestigious Japan Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS) Research Fellowship at Hiroshima in 2013 and several travel fellowships/support from many national and international organizations including UNEP, UNITAR, UNISDR, IAP, UNU, UNCRD, WCRP, IAHS, IGU, NASDA, INSA, UGC, SICI, MAIRS and University of Delhi etc. for participating and presenting papers, chairing sessions and discussing research projects in about 40 countries.

Prof. Singh was associated with numerous prestigious national and international collaborative research projects and programmes such as BRICS, ICSSR-IDPAD, CIDA-SICI, DFID, Finland Academy of Sciences, UGC and Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India. In 1988 the UNESCO/ISSC (Paris) awarded him a research and study grant in social and human sciences. Prof. Singh was the Chair, Research Council, CSIR-Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore; Ex-Member, Research Council-CSIR; Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, Lucknow; member of the International Science Council (earlier ICSU); prestigious Scientific Committee-Health and Wellbeing in Changing Urban Environment-System Analysis Approach since 2016.

His contribution to academia has rare parallel. Prof Singh will be remembered in the annals of geography as one among the few who worked relentlessly for the cause of the discipline and firmly placing Indian Geography on International platforms bringing visibility to research in Indian geography to an increasing number of international audiences. He was an honourable member of the Advisory Board of various societies/ associations in the country and abroad. In recognition of his enormous contribution to geography teaching and research, Prof. Singh was appointed in July 2018, Chair of the UGC National Committee on Learning Outcome Based Curriculum Framework. He served as the Springer publication series editor of *Advances in Geographical and Environmental Sciences*; and Sustainable Development Goals. He was also associated with the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen (Denmark) in

1998 and Visiting Professor at the University of Turku (Finland). He was one of the contributors to the famous World Atlas- Earth Concise, Millennium House Ltd., Australia.

His expertise was greatly sought in many prestigious committees of the Government of India such as the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Department of Science and Technology, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), ICSSR, CSIR, UGC, UGC-CEC, NCERT, UPSC and NIOS etc. He was a Fellow of the National Institute of Ecology. Such was his commitment to academics and research as well as policy-making that despite his poor health he was active in a legion of activities till the last day of his life. Recently UGC Consortium for Educational Communication invited him to the Academic Advisory Council for CEC MOOCS on SWAYAM. NITI Aayog, the apex policy making institution of the country invited him as a member of the all empowered committee entrusted with preparing a policy document named Vision India-2035. He was also the Chair, Task Force, Landslides Awareness, National Disaster Management Authority, Government of India, 2018-2019. He was involved with the International Science Council- Geo Union Committee on Risk and Disaster Management. He was associated with many prestigious programmes such as ISC-CODATA-PASTED as its co-Chair, member Earth System Governance and IAP-Global Network of Science Academies representative on Disaster Risk Reduction. He is one of the 3 founders of the Centre for Himalayan Studies, University of Delhi.

He has been the Chairman of the Governing Body of the two constituent colleges of Delhi University i.e. Kamla Nehru College and Shaheed Bhagat Singh College.

It is extremely hard to fathom his scholarship. This brief obituary is certain to fail to enlist the phenomenal contributions he has made to the discipline of geography. More than his achievements and contribution to teaching and research, professor Singh will be remembered for his humility, gentle demeanor, his generous and tender approach to his friends and students, and his humbleness in a world that views these qualities as being extremely rare among such achievers. Wherever he went, he brought a smile to everyone's face. He was a pious soul, a great human being and a multifaceted acclaimed personality. His presence was simply comforting; his intellect was formidable. He was viewed as a visionary, a man with a disciplined mind ready to cultivate the art of the possible. He never sought glory which followed him incessantly. He was and will remain an inspiration to a generation of students, with dreams to dream and mountains to climb. He will be remembered by students

and teachers from all over the country as he made it a point to personally reach out to colleges and universities located in the most inaccessible parts of the country. He was just not a geographer of international eminence, but a rare phenomenon!

His departure from this world is a great loss to his family members, colleagues, friends, scholars and students. It will be extremely difficult to fill the void created by the untimely demise of Prof. Singh. He will be missed for years to come. The Institute of Indian Geographers, with which Prof. Singh was deeply associated, deeply mourns his demise and extends condolence to the bereaved family to muster the strength to bear this irreparable loss.

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