



Obituary

Professor Jaidev
(1949-2000)

On the 28th of September it was, that Professor Jaidev breathed his last. He was not even 52 then. From his face and chiseled features, he looked older, but not from his slim and agile body, that showed him younger than his age. Between his body and face, there was a pleasant paradox, fascinating, indeed. That underneath this paradox, a malignancy was building up, he himself did not know. Why he, who could turn literary texts upside/down, inside/outside, to draw their inner-most meanings, could not know what threatened him mortally from within the very text of his body, looks baffling. He, himself, must have felt baffled when, lying inert on his sickbed, he would fail to recognize even his intimate friends, only to stare into the blank void.

Answer to all this lies partly perhaps with Dr Pankaj K. Singh, his colleague and friend. "A walking encyclopedia, library on the move," is how she remembers him with a wistful look in her eyes. His students, colleagues, friends and even acquaintances knew him so, without an iota of doubt in their mind. That is

why they would rush to him with their problems, no matter where he was, at his place, in the Department, the library or outside on the road for evening walk. The problems with which others rushed to him did not distract him at all from his own academic engagement, howsoever time consuming it would otherwise be. Rather than a person requiring time for his own self, he felt himself a relentless vehicle for rendering help to others.

Remarkably enough, the claim that others lay upon his time and energy did not impair the quality of his own work. To rub the truth of every insight, observation or evaluation against the grain was his forte. I vividly remember the time I first came to his Department to conduct a viva. At that time, he was a Fellow in the Institute, where he remained for two and a half years from 1st of March 1989 to 30th of November 1991. Such was his overwhelming engagement in the project on Pastiche in the Indian life, culture and literature that during the night also, he would stay on in his study in the Institute itself. Though I

was provided a room in the Guesthouse, it was an experience to sit with him in his study for almost the whole night. In the course of our night-long discussion, he put forth the exasperation he had to undergo while using the word 'intertextual' about writings, appearing to be so without reckoning with intertextuality in the essential sense of the word. After a lot of deliberation, we came to the view that for such writings, an appropriate term could be with a hyphen in between. At this he felt relieved as if a riddle, so far defying resolution, had after all been resolved to his satisfaction. It was this far-ranging discussion that impelled him to mention my name among those from whom he had gained in the writing of his book. This was a gesture of generosity on his part, for which I am ever beholden to him.

After I joined the Institute as a Fellow, we got very close to each other. Once a week to go to his place, became almost a norm with me. After hours of discussion in his study, we would go for a walk, mostly toward Boileauganj from where his wife and

daughter were to make purchases for the daily chores. By now he had come overwhelmingly under the influence of Gandhiji. With intellectual persistence seeming asymmetrical with his fragile demeanor, he sought to decode and encode in it panacea for all the ills afflicting the country. Being largely Gramscian, I had so much to reciprocate without being in total agreement with him. Had not Gramsci paid the rare compliment to Gandhiji by terming him the progenitor of passive revolution? As a result, our discussion would go on gathering into its folds so many other subjects relating to every thing under the sun. It was only after dinner that he would let me go back to my place. Himself very frugal in eating, he, with all the gentleness at his disposal, would persuade me to eat to my fill the food so deliciously prepared by his wife and served to us with so much affection by his daughter.

The most obvious thing about him was, metaphorically speaking, to function as manure so as to enable others to realize their potentialities to the extent possible. This was a generative sort of behavior growing from within and below. For this gentle and quiet behavior of his, any order, instruction from above and without, could but be anathema. Eloquence or flamboyance could never be the mark of a person of the type of Professor Jaidev. Only reliability was his mark that drew the feeling of friendliness from him in a calm and quiet way. So much so, it was not unusual for him to append his name to a letter or article in the most inconspicuous way. Rather than write his name with the first letter capital, his favorite way was to scribble it in the lower case. This was not a mannerism at all, for the wish to be one with the ordinary arose from the deepest recesses of his mind and heart. Also, his feeling of friendliness did not go after obliging the others by doing small deeds as if

they were the biggest favors. Rather, to do the biggest deed, as if it was altogether ordinary and insignificant, was a fond wish with him. For all that, his feeling of friendliness respected distance and difference. In their absence, its being lively and living, human and humane could very much be in jeopardy.

This whole structure of experience and feeling, that defined his being so well, palpitates as sub-text underneath the coherent but open-ended textuality of his literary criticism and translation. During the last two decades, his reviews of creative and critical books appeared in important journals within and without the country. He wrote countless papers for seminars organized in universities in India and abroad. He translated into English so many writings from Hindi of which a novel by Bhisham Sahni and a collection of short stories by Krishna Sobti have evoked a lot of interest from the reading public. Some months before his untimely death, he had got an assignment from the Indian Sahitya Akademi for translating a novel of Prem Chand into English. He also edited a couple of books for the Institute, which bears testimony to the seriousness he would bring to bear upon anything he took upon himself to do. He edited with great elan the first issue of *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*. One of them namely, *Social Awareness in Modern Indian Literature*, is at hand. In the Introduction, his observation about my paper that the writer dealt with "attempts to reconcile his loyalty to the Sikh community and the Punjab with his loyalty to India" sums up all its problematics.

His most crucial work in the field of literary criticism is *The Culture of Pastiche*, the product of his research at the Institute during the years 1989-1991. In this valuable book, he has studied the culture of pastiche not only in the novels of four modern

Hindi novelists, but also has examined its ramifications for life of the Indian elite in particular and the people in general. Though his analysis is extremely illuminating, yet he is candid enough to give full discount for the bias he may have consciously or unconsciously shown in this regard. For its full grasp, his whole contention deserves to be quoted in full:

My bias has occasionally given a rather emotional, non-scholarly, tinge to the discussion. However, this is not intended to be a form of self-righteousness. I, as a privileged member of the Indian middle class, am as much implicated in the culture of pastiche as the characters of Verma, Vaid and Garg are. My own culture, the way I live and the dreams I cherish, trouble me as much as do the portraits of Western pastiches in their novels. Underneath the difficult tone of this work lies a difficult confessional sub-text beginning with the maxim: charity begins at home.

Armed with all this candidness, insight and perception, Professor Jaidev brings before the eye of his imagination the whole panorama of Indian life, its feeling-based response, familial way of living, communitarian sense, neighbourly feeling, inclusive-ness and belief in some transcendent agency. It is from this position then that he examines the authenticity of representation in Mohan Rakesh vis-a-vis inauthenticity in the other three novelists. No doubt, the focus of the study is limited but its perspective is so very vast. This is because the critic has been able to negotiate a critical practice, over and above his study that in the course of his life he carried on with so much subtlety and sobriety. The critic, Jaidev, is dead but the critical practice he negotiated will go on.

TEJWANT SINGH GILL
is a former Fellow of the
Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla