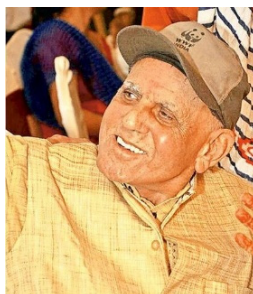


In Remembrance

Daulat Ram Chaudhry (1935-2021)



Daulat Ram Chaudhry was a teacher, public intellectual, social activist and an advocate of friendly relations between people of Haryana and Punjab - spent his whole life articulating progressive ideas, building socially transformative organisational structures and movements in Haryana, and providing insights on the depth of cultural and economic ties between the people of Punjab and Haryana. This illustrious life came to an end on June 2 due to health complications caused by Covid-19. He breathed his last at Rohtak in his room with all his family by his side.

He was born in a farming family in the village of Chautala in Haryana and was inspired by his rural and regional roots in fashioning his progressive vision and practices. He was truly an organic intellectual of the Haryana peasantry who came from the peasantry, understood the peasantry, criticised many aspects of the life and practices of the peasantry, but never abandoned his links with his community. Throughout his life he continued to think of ways to convert the peasantry to the vision of socialism. He was inspired by Marxism but never viewed Marxism in a dogmatic manner; rather he considered it as a guide to seeking creative engagement with the society he lived in.

DR, as he was affectionately called (aptly pronounced DEAR), spent three decades (1969-2000) as an English lecturer at the Dyal Singh College (Evening) of Delhi University. He was one of the founding members, along with the late Professor Randhir Singh and others, of the Left Teachers Association in the University in the 1960s which emerged later as the Democratic Teachers Front in 1979. Pedagogically, he played a

leading role in transforming the teaching of English literature from purely an aesthetic pursuit to a critical engagement with emerging social issues by placing the English language in the context of India's colonisation and the post-colonial culture of class hierarchies.

I met him first when he had moved for a few years from Delhi to take the Chairmanship of Haryana Public Service Commission (HPSC) in Chandigarh and I had left Delhi for Chandigarh to take up lectureship at Panjab University's department of economics. At our very first meeting we talked for hours, and the feeling that we shared a vision about the societal need for egalitarian transformation became the basis of a life-long friendship. After serving as Chair of HPSC in Devi Lal's government, he decided to devote his energies to raising critical awareness of issues such as casteism, gender discrimination and patriarchal culture in Haryana. He launched a Hindi weekly *Peeng* as a platform for disseminating progressive ideas. He also wrote regularly for several English and Hindi dailies and weeklies including the *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Mainstream*. He articulated his views and reflections as a progressive and critical modernist with socialist orientation. Due to his robust understanding of Haryana's rural society, he was free both from romanticism about the purity of village life and from the snobbery about rural 'backwardness' which some urban-based intellectuals are prone to display in their approaches to rural society.

He believed in the cultural renaissance of Haryana, especially in relation to the deep ruralism which impacted even its urban spaces - which were poverty-stricken culturally, socially and intellectually. This perspective led him to propose the creation of a capital city for Haryana. He was critical of Indira Gandhi for her opportunistic, messy and 'absurd' decision to designate Chandigarh as joint capital of Punjab and Haryana after the linguistic reorganisation of Punjab in 1966. For him, a capital city was a culturally lived space (following Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Production of Space*, 1966) and not merely a set of buildings and bureaucratic offices. He argued eloquently:

'Both Punjab and Haryana have been unfortunate in the matter of the state capital, but Haryana's case is more pathetic. The forced pace of modernisation of Haryana without a corresponding cultural advancement has brought in several serious distortions and has given rise to a strange ethos in Haryana society. The instruments which enrich the

cultural content in social life - quality newspapers, the film industry, a theatre movement, cultural and literary organisations, metropolitan centres, an enlightened middle class to name the most important ones - are either missing or in their incipient stage in Haryana' (Chaudhary, 1994).

Echoing DR's views and applauding his vision, I argued much later that a capital city 'is supposed to be the nerve centre of the culture and life of the people of the state where people belonging to different zones of the state come together with a common identity. The capital city is a space of cultural identity and flowering of that identity. It is a creative venue for collective exploration and celebration of the songs, dances, paintings, sculptures, architectural experiments, theatre, films, museums, the collection of memory of the people through historical narratives - all relating to the people of the state and their relationship to the wider world.

DR kept a critical eye on the social, cultural and political life of Haryana peasantry, and on the position of Haryana in India's 'national' politics. He supported inter-caste marriages, including intra-gotra marriages, and criticised the Khap Panchayat institution in Haryana's rural society which opposed such marriages. He wrote an influential book entitled *Khap Panchayat and Modern Age* (2014). I dare say, however, that given his dialectical mode of thinking which embraced contradictions, he would have been very pleased with the Khap Panchayats' crucial role in building massive solidarity among farmers against the BJP government's June 2020 farming laws, which were brought in to bolster the role of agrobusiness in Indian agriculture.

Combining the art of seeing micro-trends with a view of the wider macro framework, DR was able to read under-currents in Haryana society that were truly extraordinary. Once he shared with me his reading of the Haryana peasantry's attitude towards Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947-84), the rebellious Sikh religious preacher who was pushed into becoming an anti-Centre agitator in the early 1980s. This was a time when the mainstream media, especially the English-language and Hindi-language media, had so constructed the narrative of Bhindranwale as a blood-thirsty anti-Hindu terrorist that all right-wing institutions (led by the Congress and BJP) echoed and amplified this narrative for a variety of reasons. Most left-wing institutions (led in particular by the CPI and CPM) had also succumbed to this narrative. In a sharp contrast, DR's view was that the farming community in Haryana did not view Bhindranwale as a

Sikh opposing the Hindu-dominated Centre but as a farmer opposing the money-lending classes who occupied power in Delhi. He told me that a middle-level civil servant in Haryana with social roots in the peasantry used to express this contrarian view of Bhindranwale in private gatherings by praising him for his defiance of the money-lending classes. It is only an organic intellectual of a class who can synthesise ordinary-sounding social conversations to identify an undercurrent which is totally invisible to an outsider.

Equipped with this knowledge, DR was also able to explain why there was almost no anti-Sikh violence in the farmer-dominated areas of Haryana after Indira Gandhi's assassination in October 1984 (when she was shot by two of her Sikh security guards because of her action in sending the army into the Golden Temple in June 1984). After the assassination, Delhi and many other Hindu majority towns in the Hindi belt had seen genocidal mob violence against Sikhs, while Haryana's farming community stood in solid defence of their Sikh neighbours when non-farming groups tried in isolated cases to whip up hatred and violence against the Sikhs.

When I saw the Haryana peasantry welcoming the Punjabi farmers who led the recent protests against the pro-agro-business farm laws, I remembered the strength of DR's observations made in the 1980s. It helped me to understand that it was not only the issues of Minimum Support Price and state-protected marketing arrangements that lay behind the solidarity between Haryana and Punjab farmers, but also the strength of deeper cultural and social ties between the peasantry of the two states. It also helped me to understand the reasons behind the high esteem enjoyed by the late Chhotu Ram (1881-1945), the legendary farmer leader of Haryana, in today's Punjab.

In the last years of his life, he collaborated with like-minded and public-spirited friends to launch the *Haryana Insaaf Society* to fight for justice for those who were marginalised, ignored and discriminated. He also showed openness of mind in dealing with the issue of religion and was free from the dominant Indian Marxist concept of religion as 'the opium of the masses' or more absurdly as 'false consciousness'. In the last years of his life, he showed keen sympathy towards Buddhism, travelled to areas of Buddhist influence in India and involved himself fully in practising Buddhism.

In a vast and diverse country such as India, a meaningful civilisational shift away from the current consumerist culture and obsession with

monetised income growth to a vision geared towards equity, social care and ecological sustainability is only possible if public intellectuals rooted in the regional cultures and languages can inspire social mobilisation for such a transition.

D R Chaudhry practised in his daily and family life what he believed and preached. This is reflected in the rich intellectual and political legacy he has left which is being furthered by his talented children Kamla Chaudhry and Bhupinder Chaudhry (and his wife Rajshree Dhali) as academics, and Ashwani Chaudhry (and his wife Kumud Chaudhry) as film directors. I am sure that family and friends will come together to create an institutional framework as a platform to carry forward the progressive vision of this great son of Haryana and, therefore, of the larger historical Punjab containing Haryana.

Reference

Chaudhry, D. R. (1994). 'Punjab- Haryana Disputes' in Gopal Singh (ed) *Punjab: Past, Present and Future*. Delhi: Ajanta Publications, pp. 400-11.

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Pritam Singh,
Oxford Brookes University, UK

Anjum Singh (1967-2020)



On November 17, 2020 in the early hours of the morning, the artist, Anjum Singh, passed on at the age of 53. It has been almost a quarter century since I first walked into the Singh home in Delhi. Little did I know at the

time that I wouldn't be leaving, soon or for that matter, any time. It has been lifelong relationships with all of them, and therefore it was hard to say goodbye to the youngest of the three.

Anjum was born in Delhi in 1967 to two artists, Arpita and Paramjit Singh. From early on art and artists surrounded her and she seamlessly and comfortably adopted it as her own life. After studying art at Kala Bhavan at Shanti Niketan, she gained a Masters in Painting from the Delhi College of Art in 1991. Later she further continued her art education at Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC from 1992-94. Eventually settling back in her hometown of Delhi to live and work. It was not easy though for her to carve her artistic space in the shadow of two giants of Indian art, but she was tenacious and pursued her art with openness and youthful exuberance.

Anjum loved to immerse herself in the city life – culturally, socially, and artistically. It was amongst the workings and processes of the burgeoning metropolis of Delhi she found her inspiration for work. Imbibing and creating the patterns, the frenzy, the discarded and the desirable of the City. She experimented and incorporated a wide range of media in her work from pvc pipes to magnets, recycled soda bottles to steel, but eventually settling on her first choice and love – painting.

Anjum's works transitioned from the reflection of the changing urban human condition to the changing of her own condition after her first diagnosis of cancer in 2014. Intrigued and aware, Anjum refocused internally – exploring to identify, understand and confront the nemesis taking residence within her own body. Anjum's last exhibition in 2019 at Talwar Gallery, New Delhi – *I Am Still Here* – attended not only to the body as lived experience, as felt from the inside, but also to the way this experience is translated into comprehensible form – the way the body is narrated, pictured, made sense of. Calling attention to the power of art, like science or medicine, to plumb the inner workings of the body, the exhibition created its own vocabulary, honest and revealing. The boldness and determination of her statement – *I am still here* – makes itself heard in the energy and the fragile beauty of even the most delicate of her works. It was not just the significance of the artist or the moment, but immense fondness as well for Anjum that was on display at the opening where masses from all parts of the art Indian art ecosystem descended at Talwar Gallery to celebrate her and her work.



Anjum Singh: Belly Button

Anjum was a fighter, and I don't just mean the courageous battle she did with her cancer over the last six and half years, but she also liked to argue and will pick a fight, if it was for something that mattered to her. No matter where and with whom, she always spoke her mind. Even admonishing you, she would flash a beaming smile. Anjum may not be with us today but she did leave us a bold, beautiful, yet poignant body of work, totally her own. Anjum is still, here.

Deepak Talwar
Talwar Gallery