

O B I T U A R Y



Professor Pooran Chand Joshi
(June 1, 1956- June 20, 2025)

It is with a very heavy heart that I am writing this obituary of my beloved mentor and teacher Prof. Pooran Chand Joshi, who left for heavenly abode on June 20, 2025. At the age of 69 years, he breathed his last in a hospital in Delhi. Prof. Joshi retired from service as Professor (Higher Academic Grade) from the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi on May 31, 2021. His contribution to the field of anthropology is unmatched. He was one of the leading Medical Anthropologists in South Asia.

My association with Prof. Joshi dates back to July 2004, when I joined the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi to pursue postgraduate course. Prof. Joshi was very popular among the students because of his punctuality and regularity in taking classes. The students developed a perception about him as a professional who remains completely engrossed in his work, and as a kind-hearted person who is ever ready to help students. His contribution to the field

of anthropological knowledge lies not only in explaining what anthropology is, but how best it could be practiced.

In the year 1972, Prof. Joshi joined the University of Delhi to pursue his Bachelor of Science degree. Initially, he was not sure about the courses he would opt in the science faculty. He came across a clerk of the science faculty, who suggested him to opt for Anthropology. The clerk also suggested that he should better visit the department that was located in the science faculty itself and inquire more about the prospects of the subject. Mr. Kamlesh Guha was then the museum curator of the department. Mr. Guha in his own way explained to him about the subject. Mr. Joshi became interested in anthropology and got enrolled in Hans Raj College, in honours course Anthropology. Later, he completed his M.Sc., M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees in Anthropology, from the University of Delhi. Prof. Joshi had an interest in the field of Medical Anthropology. He submitted his doctoral thesis on the topic "Illness, Health and Culture: Dynamics of Therapy in a Central Himalayan Tribe" under the supervision of Prof. J.D. Mehra. He conducted fieldwork in a village Silgaon (pseudonym) of Jaunsar Bawar region of Uttarakhand. Soon after the completion of Ph.D. degree, he was appointed as Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, H.N.B. Garhwal University, Srinagar, Uttar Pradesh (erstwhile) in the year 1985. Later, in the year 1987, Prof. Joshi joined the Department of Medical Anthropology, Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Science, Delhi, as Associate Professor and Head. In the year 2003, he joined the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi as Professor, and later became the Head of the Department in January 2019.

Within the holistic frame of anthropology, Prof. Joshi's contribution can be located in the fields of social, biological and archaeological anthropology. Epistemologically, his orientation was both positivistic and interpretive. He was an ardent believer in the method of triangulation in research. His academic writings include ten books, around ninety research articles, more than fifty chapters in edited books, around fourteen project reports and six reports submitted to the Government of India. He has also published newspaper articles and editorials. His writings can be categorized into four broad themes, namely, Health, Religion, Disasters and Environment. His writings also include reflexive accounts of the growth and status of the discipline of social anthropology in general and medical anthropology in particular.

Being trained in Medical Anthropology, Prof. Joshi has extensively researched and published on the issues of tribal health and medicine, an area which was very close to his heart and also proved to be very important for the realization of his academic, professional and personal interests. His focus had been on the issues of health seeking behavior, alternative and traditional

forms of healing and their contemporary relevance and interaction with the state, democratic polity and global forces, etiologies of disease, epidemiology, drug use and mental health.

In recognition of his contributions in the field of Anthropology, Prof. Joshi has been awarded with several honors and citations. He was the recipient of the Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra National Award for the year 1987. This award was conferred upon him by an organization called 'The Friends of Trees', in recognition of his environment specific works. In the year 2007, he was conferred with the Certificate of Honour jointly by the Delhi Psychiatry Society and Psychiatres-Du Monde, France. A plaque of appreciation was awarded to him by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan, Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines in 2008. In the year 2009, he received the Certificate of Appreciation in the IIIrd National PG Convention of the Indian Association of Public Health Dentistry, K.D. Dental College and Hospital, Mathura. In the same year, Prof. Joshi received a Certificate of Appreciation for his research on disaster impacts in Asia and Europe from the Faculty of Public Health, University of Indonesia . Besides these awards and appreciations, Prof. Joshi also had the honour of becoming visiting faculty to some of the world's renowned universities like the University of Heidelberg, Germany, Global Forum for Health, Geneva, and the University of Hyderabad, India.

Prof. Joshi will be remembered not only as an academician but also as an able administrator. He served the University of Delhi as Pro Vice-Chancellor and later as Vice-Chancellor (acting). During his tenure as Vice-Chancellor (acting) of the University of Delhi, India was reeling under the impact of Covid-19. It was his administrative acumen that steered University of Delhi out of this challenging situation. He is also credited with initiating long-pending promotions of college and university teachers of Delhi University.

Prof. Joshi led a number of professional bodies in Anthropology. He held the post of the President, Society for Indian Medical Anthropology (SIMA), headquartered at Mysuru; Vice-President, United Indian Anthropology Forum (UIAF); and Vice-Chairman, Indian National Confederation and Academy of Anthropologists (INCAA) till he breathed his last. He once told me that the idea to form SIMA was germinated in Pune in 1978, when he and Prof. H. K. Bhat were participating in the post- plenary session on Medical Anthropology at the Xth International Conference of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences. SIMA, as a society got registered in 1985. He was also instrumental in organizing the World Anthropology Congress 2023 held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. As Vice-Chairman of INCAA, he contributed significantly in organising Indian Anthropology Congress. He was the former Editorial Advisory Board member of the Journal of Indian Anthropological Society.

Prof. Joshi's contribution to the discipline is not simply confined to university lectures and academic publications, but extended beyond, covering his entire approach towards the knowledge cosmology. In many occasions, a casual conversation with him provided a very deep insight and a very mundane looking event turned out to be an event of great anthropological importance. His biggest contribution to the discipline, besides generating academic knowledge is in the form of training human resources for the future of Anthropology. He was out and out a fieldworker. He enjoyed doing anthropological fieldwork, going to villages, talking with people and documenting their life processes. He made good use of still and video cameras in the field to generating visual field documents. I remember doing a fieldwork with him in *Babraich* district of Uttar Pradesh on a MICRODIS project related to the documentation of lives of people affected by recurrent flooding. He used to carry a video camera and document the lives of the affected people which later on was converted into a short documentary on flood affected people of Bahraich. He also led a team to research on the Aila (a super cyclone) affected Sundarban region of West Bengal as a part of his interest in disaster study. He was also very much interested in historical and archaeological records and artifacts. His eyes would light up with joy whenever he would come across any object/artifact/building having archaeological significance. It was this interest that led him to discover a paleolithic site in Delhi.

Prof. P. C. Joshi was a very loving and kind hearted person and always ready to help his students and colleagues. Because of his vast academic and administrative experiences, many people used to come to him for advice. He would patiently listen to everyone and would do his best to mitigate the problem. Basically, he was a very humble and down-to-earth person. He was easily approachable by his students and colleagues. Such qualities made him a complete person. His demise is a great loss to the Indian academia and especially to the discipline of Anthropology. The void that has been created can never be filled. I extend my deepest and heartfelt condolences to his family and his loved ones.

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