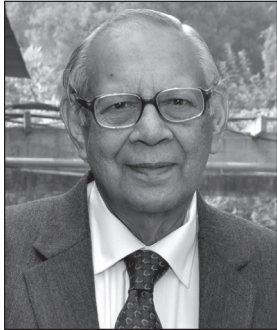


Obituaries

Ranjit Roy Chaudhury

(4 November 1930–27 October 2015)



It was my privilege and, even more so, joy to have been associated closely with Professor Ranjit Roy Chaudhury during the last 6 years of his life. Prof, as he was referred to by many of us who considered him a friend, guide and mentor, was a remarkable combination of the gravitas that comes with knowledge and experience and the wisdom of his years, with a child-like excitement for people and everyday experiences.

To refer briefly to his brilliant career, he was a graduate of the Prince of Wales Medical College, Patna. As the first physician recipient of the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship, he obtained a DPhil from Oxford and joined the Department of Pharmacology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences as Assistant Professor at the age of 28 years. He went on to become Professor of Pharmacology at the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh at the young age of 34 years. He was at PGIMER for two brief spells (1964–70 and 1977–80) but is still remembered with great respect and regard, for his many contributions especially in establishing the first Clinical Pharmacology training programme of the country. He always considered it *his* Institute, and PGIMER graduates always had a special place for him. I was one of those lucky ones, although our time there coincided only for a brief period in 1977, when many layers of hierarchy separated me (then just a Tutor) and him, the Dean and later Acting Director.

After spending many years at WHO (1970–77 and 1981–90) in various capacities, he returned to settle in New Delhi, and held the position of Emeritus Scientist at the National Institute of Immunology. At this time, I had recently joined the Department of Immunology at the Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Lucknow as an Associate Professor. Prof started many new activities and among them was the Delhi Society for the Promotion and Rational Use of Medicines (DSPRUD), a subject which was a lifelong passion for him. I was surprised and amazed that he should have even remembered me, when in the mid-1990s he invited me to be on some of the monitoring groups for DSPRUD programmes. Subsequently, he also asked me to be the Immunologist on the Indian Council of Medical Research Toxicology Review Panel. That was a period when a lot of contraceptive-related research activities were going on around the world and the panel was involved in evaluating new products developed in India and elsewhere for use in the Indian family planning programme. This was my first close working collaboration with Prof, and it was a wonderful learning experience. I not only learnt the science, which was new to me, but the many ethical issues that were so crucial to each of these projects. But above all, I watched his deft handling of dissent, his exceptional politeness and courtesy, which won over the worst of adversaries and his faith in consensus. And then, of course, there was the hospitality. I came usually by the overnight train from Lucknow for these meetings, and he would always insist that I (and others as well) go

home with him to have tea/dinner before heading back for the station for the night train.

We met off and on through those years, and he always made it a point to call if he was coming to Lucknow. It was after I retired in 2009 and moved to the National Capital Region, that he involved me in many of his activities and asked me to join him at the Apollo Hospitals Educational and Research Foundation (AHERF), which he was heading. And these 6 years that we worked together were a great association that has left indelible and wonderful memories that I will always treasure.

Prof had a meticulous approach to his work, every talk was prepared many days in advance and every write-up submitted well before deadlines and reminders. His punctuality was legendary, and he and I (also a victim of the PGI tradition of punctuality) were most often the only ones in the room to start a meeting. His politeness and courtesy was from another age, which we are slowly losing. He would never leave a meeting without thanking each and every person by name, including the attendants.

But most of all, it was his love for people that shone through, always wanting to know people beyond the official relationships. I was introduced to his Patna school friends, college mates, his WHO associates, old colleagues, so many others, who came to meet him for advice, help or just a chat. Others came, either with letters of reference from friends and acquaintances or because they had heard his talk somewhere. He had time for everyone and always gave full attention to each visitor. He also made every effort to stay in touch with people. He never had any personal agenda, and I never heard him speak ill of anyone.

I have not gone over his many, many achievements, which include the Shanti Swaroop Bhatnagar award and Padma Shri, as these are available in the public domain. But it would not be an exaggeration to say that no other health professional has contributed more to the healthcare policy domain, be it medical education, public health, drug regulation, clinical research, ethics, etc. over the past two decades, than Professor Ranjit Roy Chaudhury. Among these contributions are the National Commission on Macroeconomics and Health in 2005, National Committee for Formulating the Policy and Guidelines on Drugs and Clinical Trials in 2013 and Committee for review of the Indian Medical Council Act (1956) in 2014. It speaks volumes of his personality that his advice was valued by successive governments, irrespective of political leanings.

And finally, once all the work was over, he was also a party man, finding the energy to attend many evening social functions to catch up with friends and all the latest gossip. He would frequently call me the next morning, to chat about all that he had heard on the capital grapevine. It is over 10 months that he is no more with us, but I still miss those morning calls and his eager voice and infectious laugh.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that it was an immeasurable privilege to have worked so closely with Prof in these last few years. They certainly, don't make them like him anymore!

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