

Commemorative



Prof. Jacob Aikara (1941–2023) A Relentless Scholar in a Good Man for All Seasons (Editor, *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development* 2004–12)

A career researcher academician, Prof. Jacob Aikara, was a thorough professional. He went about his tasks as a researcher in the stimulating but very conducive academic environs of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

Known endearingly as Chackochan in his family circles, Jacob was born in the verdant Kottayam district of Kerala on 8 September 1941. He completed his school leaving certificate meritoriously from Mannanam St. Ephrem's High School, and his higher education at Pune University where he completed his Master's and PhD in Sociology, and began his career as an educator there. He was awarded the prestigious Full Bright scholarship, and he completed a post-doctoral programme in the United States and joined TISS as Reader in the research unit for the Sociology of Education in 1987.

He is remembered by his students for his matter-of-fact approach towards engaging—sessions on social problems in India. Despite being provoked by the students, he would remain non-committal towards any position regarding the issues, for he felt that it was for them to form their stand rather than being influenced by his own politics regarding them. That is indicative of his intellectual and academic integrity, which was sensed by the young social work students, who were charged with enthusiasm and passion and wanted to know the position of their professor. However, he would accommodate their requests for change in pedagogy, allowing opportunities to experiment with student-led sessions, which, after a while, did not show signs of sustainability.

Sociological research was his forte, and without creating much noise about it, he went about it in a systematic manner. He led the department which had young and seasoned researchers with divergent viewpoints harmoniously, with no one having to compromise on one's stance on issues.

Besides independent and team research for the unit, he was instrumental in guiding several scholars in the track of research and publication. Several of them vouch for the

support they received in this regard. I recall with gratitude his support in forming a theoretical perspective for my MA research project while being a student at TISS, as well as later on, helping me publish papers in the journal he was editing.

His typical academic bent of mind did not deprive him of administrative abilities. Besides heading the research unit on the Sociology of Education for almost two decades, he also guided the national institute as its deputy director from May 1998 till his retirement in 2004 and as officiating director between November 1999 and July 2000. He was appreciated for his unbiased, helpful disposition during his administrative tenure.

It was a blessing for Rajagiri College of Social Sciences that he decided to shift to Kochi. When our then director Rev. Jose Alex CMI, invited him to join us and guide the college in establishing its journal, *Rajagiri Journal of Social Development* (RJSD), he didn't put forward any conditions to accept the offer. And thus, post-2004, Prof. Aikara became a Rajagirian. In no time, he managed to get the paper works done for initiating the journal, and the journal was on the rails as scheduled. As the founding editor of RJSD, his careful planning in advance enabled the journal to maintain good quality and release at regular intervals for seven years.

Though it was not his task to teach, he willingly took up the task of sharing the classes on Sociology for Social Work, and when we introduced the new course in Environment and Disaster Management in the Social Work curriculum, he volunteered to take the course, as there was no one having a specific background in the subject. I recall his willing participation in the planning meetings and in the department level outings, one of which was hosted by him at his new residence in the neighbourhood of the college.

TISS campus remembers his commitment to fitness. Thanks to his initiative, a badminton court was laid on the campus, and senior faculty members, including him, played

on the campus regularly, with students as well, drawing inspiration from the model. Keeping himself slim and trim, he showed great agility and stamina on the playing court.

It was indeed a shock when what could be described as a minor accident took a vicious turn on 16 March 2012, to incapacitate this vibrant presence forever. Being grazed by a two-wheeler passing by as he stepped out of his car after parking the same, he lost balance and fell to the ground, perhaps, hitting his head on the floor. However, he managed to get up, only to experience severe discomfort and then be taken to the hospital without delay. The brain injury did not heal, and he became permanently immobile, also losing his capacity to respond. The very gentle care given by his wife, an inspirational model in marital partnership, sustained him through the long eleven years of confinement to his home – the only permitted movement being that on a wheelchair. He was released of that bondage on the 9th of May 2023.

Together with his students and erstwhile colleagues, Rajagiri academic community salutes this stalwart Sociologist of our country. We recall with great esteem his commitment to learning, his intellectual honesty, academic integrity, willingness to take responsibility, readiness to mentor youngsters in the path of research and publication, and above all, being the gentleman that he was! He was

never heard speaking ill of others. He acknowledged his faith in law and was proud to go by the rules in his personal life and the offices he managed. The online gathering organised by TISS to commemorate him brought forth the multi-faceted goodness of Prof. Aikara—a good man in a world, where ‘a good man is hard to find’. Prof. Leena Abraham, his erstwhile colleague and the current department head of the Centre for Research in Sociology of Education at TISS, summarised his profile thus: ‘He was a pillar of strength and support to his colleagues, and they remember him as an esteemed colleague and role model at the Centre for Studies Sociology of Education. His high ethical and academic standards guided the work of the Centre that he headed for more than two decades’.

With gladness and pride, I recall my good fortune of being his student and colleague.

‘In the frame of fame of such great scholars, there is no fear of ageing or death’, as Bhartrhari points out—they become eternal. Salutations to a noble soul for his genuine presence and committed service! May his spirit rest in joy and peace, eternal!

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