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*From P C K Prem -a tribute to Dr Chambial*

*D C Chambial*

*- the end of a memorable poetic journey*

It was the end of a soft, evocative and emphatic poetic life. I was terribly shocked. Death was it so close that day the moment I opened eyes on Wednesday morning on November 20, 2024. I learnt that Dr D C Chambial – a bilingual poet and editor, a critic and a translator was no more. He had expired at 9.30 PM on Tuesday night (November 19, 2024). It was not expected. No doubt, he has been suffering from minor problems but never pinpointed as to what precisely was the ailment. Now, all is over. Efforts to save were arduous and sustained but destiny had designed it differently. Now, he is no more but memories stay on beyond life. The spoken words keep echoing long after the man is gone but the written words resurrect imaginings, and various figures take shape before as if he were speaking to the invisibly seen faces and figures. It is what happening today when I sit to write down about the man so close to me a week earlier saying final goodbye -

He's left far from where

none ever returns

...to tell about the voyage

The words pithily speak of life's dilemma and convolution where everybody runs to find import in living but comes out empty handed 'in the search of the face lost in void in/the valley of maya.' Here, Chambial spoke about the eternal truth 'in memory of a dead friend.'

A close association of fifty years is a huge chunk in time. I remember it was a hesitant but determined start of a self-published poetry journal Poetcrit carrying just a few dozens of pages, a local press printed. Here, Chambial tried to publish blank and at times, rhymed verse but it was an admirable literary feat at a far corner of a hill state. I knew it but I had not met him for a few years due to different nature of job. Suddenly, one day, the humble and modest man with eye-catching smiles entered my office and greeted. I was perplexed to see him after years. I got up with a jerk and held him close –a natural expression of love it was. Next moment, he handed over a little poetry book. I

shuffled the pages with a beaming smile. It was a lonely man's venture into an area uncertain. I joined his poetic journey when he asked me to contribute to the journal. He inspired many new poets and gave adequate space in the journal. It was Chambial's humility, gentleness and patience with love and warmth that roped in many old and young writers and poets. Notwithstanding, a few hiccups, obstacles and economic issues, he continued with the Poetcrit of which the thirty-seventh volume ending December 2024 is out. I understand Volume 38 must be with the publisher and believe the young intelligent and innovative women Assistant Editors must be planning a vibrant and more powerful future for the journal enjoying warm love, co-operation and encouragement of poetry lovers and readers in this hour of crisis.

I watch members of the family somberly with elegance doing sundry duties during the rituals. When I requested his son to speak of his famous poet-father, he assured me that he would share thoughts with me after the rituals. He kept his word and sent a communiqué from Assam on December 5, 2024 where he had to join immediately after the ritualistic ceremonies were over. I could easily find influence of Chambial on what they said and the way they acted during those tiring and heartbreaking days.

The innocent pleadings of little granddaughter Shatakshi, daughter of Pooja – Akhilesh, ruefully uttered in simple poignant words, 'Dadu....I love you, I miss you so much. Aap kahan chale gaye. Ab mujhe Satto kaun bulayega. Please come back.'

I just wondered at the child's utterances when I was amazed to find a poem, the other grand- daughter Sienna, daughter of Raveena-Avaneesh had composed after the death of her grandfather. I would love to share with admirers and poetry lovers the emotional range, feelings and thoughts of Sienna that speak of an upcoming poet, who calls him 'The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived.'

"Your last text echoes in my mind:

"wearing the shirt you gifted."

People express love in countless ways

You did through your heartfelt messages.

with those forwarded WhatsApp messages.

And "best of luck," you'd say

out of context—"in your final exams."

Because even when I forgot about my tests,

you always remembered...

You'd send me pictures of our garden;

snowclad mountains of our beautiful Himachal,

Because even though you never said it,

you waited earnestly for me to come home.

You'd send me riveting stories,

and share your favourite poems,  
and no matter what message you framed,  
you'd end it with "God bless you".  
Every time, without fail—  
"God bless you."  
And god did bless me..."

His younger daughter-in-law Pooja observes mildly that Dr. D.C. Chambial, my father-in-law, was widely known as a great academician, literary scholar, and renowned poet. To me, he was a remarkable family man with deep-rooted values. A kind and humble soul, he was soft-spoken, calm, and never argumentative in the ten years I spent with him. His support extended to every aspect of life, including household chores. Always awake before me, he prepared his signature kaadha every morning, and our kitchen chats remain some of my fondest memories. His presence and values are irreplaceable, and I pray we honour his legacy by keeping his memories alive forever.

When requested, the elder daughter-in-law Raveena gently tells, "What can I say about Daddy Ji? He was not just my father-in-law; he truly became a father to me after I lost my own shortly after marriage. His extra care, support, and wisdom filled the void in my life. A man of modern and practical thinking, he treated me with respect and encouraged me to embrace my individuality. Whether it was sharing stories, offering his car so I could work comfortably, or surprising me with gestures like buying a new scooter on my suggestion, his actions always spoke of his selflessness and thoughtfulness. Even in his last moments, his concern was for others. When he saw me in the hospital, he asked about the condition of my mother who is presently hospitalised.

Daddy Ji's values, kindness, and love left an indelible mark on everyone around him. His absence feels surreal, like a bad dream we can't wake from. Though he is no longer with us, his memory remains alive in our hearts, filled with love and immense respect. No one can fill the gap he left behind."

I observe his elder son Brig. Avaneesh Chambial, performing rituals with solemnity and dignity treasuring within many memories of his father now merged in Panchabbuta while the younger son sits to attend to small errands for which he gets silent nods even as his daughters-in-law take care of relations and friends attending the ceremony. I could not find time during the rituals to speak to any one of the members of the family.

However, on my request, Avaneesh Chambial wrote about his father, "My father was calmness personified. He was very methodical, always unflustered even in challenging times. He led by example, embodying the values he imparted to me. A man of wisdom and quiet strength, he instilled in me the love for reading and encouraged independent, rational thinking. Poetry was his true passion, and he devoted his life to it. When I was young, he used to involve me in his magazine 'Poetcrit' by telling me to check the drafts, sort things and write mailing addresses on envelopes. His

actions spoke as eloquently as his words, and his unwavering integrity inspired everyone around him. My father's thoughtful guidance shaped the foundation of who I am today. His principles and lessons will continue to light my path always.

Akhilesh Chambial, the younger son speaks as he looks at the horizon trying to figure out father's form and face, and says briefly, "Losing a father is the toughest challenge in one's life. Passing of my father has created a void that no words can fill. His kindness & wisdom touched everyone who came in contact with him. He was a wonderful father who lived a remarkable life & was a role model to many. He was strict, encouraging & very supportive throughout his life. His memory will forever remain alive in my heart & also of all those who knew him."

The gloomy and emotional scenario turns more disheartening and murky when eyes repeatedly fall on the woman of a few words, who was a solid support to the fine poet of inimitable edifying conduct. After immense efforts, his spouse Kanta hesitantly speaks, "He was my soulmate and words cannot fully capture what he meant to me. He was my everything, the start and end of my day. Instead of using my name, he affectionately called me "Madam," always treating me as an equal. His dedication to work was unwavering, yet he remained a supportive husband, loving father, and caring grandfather. He encouraged me to pursue my education after marriage, enabling me to graduate and earn a diploma in stenography. His unwavering support helped me win a Panchayat Pradhan election. Though he is gone, his spirit lives in my heart forever." She emotively adds as if praying, "Dear Chambial ji, give me the strength to carry forward the responsibilities you left behind."

I still cherish each word the members of the family said. Indeed, Chambial was a man who knew the language of love, compassion and warmth...

As I look back, I find he lived for poetry as if it were the life and soul of a true human being. It not only purifies but also pulls up a human being from the dark and abysmal depths of defeat and failure he held. Poetry strengthens faith in life and existence. Just believe in the natural surge as if it were a silent hidden tributary streaming far away in the undulating terrains with unique unheard musical tunes revitalizing soul and mysticism inside, he often told in a deeply reflective frame of mind. Those were exclusive moments.

As a poet, he looked adoring, affectionate, malleable and kindhearted but a critic in him was wordlessly charitable yet expressed mild anger when noticed tiny innocuous errors that authors unwittingly make frequently. To write is pleasant but to edit is an awesome task, he often said. Bowdlerization is a learning process as you go through the critical articles for the journal or long script of a book or any other piece of writing with some objective he often observed. You cannot put many restrictions on the writers or poets...no it is detrimental, uncultured and unsophisticated practice but one cannot avoid if one wishes to be a genuine editor. During his serious ponderings, he irritated me but I heard and heard him only. When asked, he told frankly, "No I do not adhere to at times what I say." His quizzical deep gaze continued to look at the horizon as if he were still not inclusive. This

incomplete extensiveness stayed sans a definite solution and I realized there was no point in the ongoing talk. I feel this is the dilemma with many genuine editors and critics. To arrive at some absolute totality or finality in truth is a collapse of a true search. Today, I look back; I find a serene face with a bright optimistic flicker. This is how the life ends... you end up with an incomplete voyage somewhere, perhaps to restart it in the life beyond with an iota of certainty and immense indefiniteness... and it speaks of continuity. An irreparable loss to the literary world it is. I regret. I wrote these words. Alas! He is no more. God bless the Soul.

**P C K PREM**

**Email: [pckpremkatoch@gmail.com](mailto:pckpremkatoch@gmail.com)**

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## **BIO**

An author of more than seventy books, P C K Prem (p c katoch of garh-malkher, palampur, himachal, a former academician, civil servant and member himachal public service commission, shimla), a post-graduate (1970) in English literature from Punjab University, Chandigarh, is a poet, novelist, short story writer, trans-creator and a critic in English and Hindi from Himachal, India.