

Man Mohan Chaudhri (1935–2013)

Science in the media in India has a rather recent history. While All India Radio had an occasional interview with one scientist or the other, it was really with the start of Doordarshan in 1965 when it began its daily national broadcast that the idea of bringing in science through television was initiated. First it used to borrow programmes from abroad, such as the BBC programme by David Attenborough or the Carl Sagan shows from USA. But the major fillip came with two national catalysts: one with the closed circuit TV (CCTV) facility that was part of the educational activities at the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) around 1966/67, and the start of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), initiated by E. V. Chitnis through the Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad, as part of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). It was around this time too that Man Mohan Chaudhri, originally trained as a physicist, joined IITK and took quickly and seriously onto television. He was a major force in the CCTV experiment and in campus programmes at IITK, and when the SITE initiative started, he became part of it. This then was the birth of Man Mohan Chaudhri as a science media expert and an educationist.

Today, this pioneer in science education and science broadcasting is no more with us. Chaudhri passed away peacefully in his sleep on 16 August 2013 at his home in Gurgaon, off New Delhi. Born in October 1935, Man Mohan was a Lucknow boy, where he went to school and college and then joined the Ph D programme at Delhi University, where he obtained his Ph D physics. Following this, he went to the University of Iowa, USA as a postdoctoral fellow and returned to India to join IITK in 1966/67. But by 1970, taking advantage of the in-campus CCTV as the catalyst, he switched to Film and Television and studied ETV at London and travelled extensively around the world under the Ford Foundation Fellowship. Returning to IITK, he produced films and TV programmes.

In campus, apart from his teaching and research activities, Man Mohan had particular interests in a variety of other aspects of human intellectual endeavours. He took to painting seriously and carried on his painting passion until the last day. One of his earliest paintings was in fact a portrait of his wife Dhruvi (nee Chhaya) in 1965, after about four years of his marriage (in Iowa) with her. At IITK, he took keen interest and helped bring fine arts and serious cinema into the campus.



Leaving IITK in 1976, he moved to Delhi as professor and head in the Department of Teaching Aids at the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). In 1984, he was appointed the first Joint Director of the Central Institute of Educational Technology, NCERT. He set up six state institutes of Educational Technology as the National Project Director of an UNDP Project 'INSAT for Education'. During his tenure in NCERT, Man Mohan worked on various national and international projects and committees of UNDP and the Government of India.

Upon voluntary retirement from NCERT in 1990, Man Mohan joined Times Television of the *Times of India* as

General Manager and in 1991, he started the unforgettable science series 'Turning point' with Naseeruddin Shah on the Doordarshan national network. After producing 27 episodes of this series, he moved to JAIN TV to look after their news and business telecasts.

In September 1995, Man Mohan joined as Director of the Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), an Inter-University Centre of the University Grants Commission to look after its 17 media centres and the UGC-CEC telecasts on Doordarshan. He started three new media centres, a newsletter, national educational video competition and PRAKRITI, an annual film festival on environment, development and human rights. He scripted, produced and directed five films related to science and education, and more than hundred videotapes besides numerous posters, charts and tape slide sets. He won the National Film Award and Cup of Rome for his film 'ATOMS' and bagged international prizes for his video productions. He was a member of the jury at the Mumbai International Film Festival, 2000.

He loved to paint and exhibited his paintings at Iowa, Lucknow, Kanpur, Delhi and Gurgaon. He was involved in organizing workshops for primary school teachers towards science teaching and appreciation of creativity, joy and freedom for children. He started and ran a book and film club at the Gallerie Alternatives in Gurgaon for more than a decade, an oasis in an intellectual desert. He taught and brought up his two foster grandchildren. He was a visiting professor at NCERT for a year during 2007–08.

Man Mohan leaves behind his wife and two daughters.

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