

PROFESSOR RAM KUMAR SAKSENA
(1897-1970)

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On the 1st. of September, 1970, India lost a great botanist and a great educationist by the sudden passing away of Prof. Ram Kumar Saxena. The entire botanical world felt gloomy not only because we lost a great botanist from our midst but also a perfect gentleman known for his extreme sociability and helpful attitude towards others in all matters. To those of us, who were his direct students or were closely connected with

him, it was a stunning and sudden blow.

Prof. Ram Kumar Saxena was born at Orai (U. P.) on August 16, 1897. His early education was completed at Orai where he passed Matriculation examination as a student of the Govt. High School. He then joined St. John's College, Agra where he graduated in the year 1920. For his post-graduate studies he joined the Banaras Hindu University and passed M. Sc. in Botany in 1922 securing the first position. Soon afterwards, he joined the University of Allahabad as a lecturer in Botany and in this institution he continued to serve till he retired as Professor and Head of the Department of Botany in the year 1959.

Prof. Saxena's interests in Botany were wide and various and he was one of the few Indian botanists who could still be called an all-rounder. However, his main interest centred round various aspects of Mycology and Plant Pathology. He went to France to work under the world-renowned Cytologist Professor Guilliermond, and obtained the coveted degree of Docteur's Sciences of Sorbonne University (Paris) in 1935. He made an indelible mark in the field by achieving

results in the extra-nuclear cytology of several fungi. His work on mitochondrial study in *Pythium* was specially notable in this direction. He also became interested in the ecology of soil fungi and root-disease fungi, and trained a number of students to form a strong school of workers on soil microorganisms at Allahabad.

Professor Saksena was associated with a number of learned societies. He was a fellow of the National Institute of Sciences (now the Indian National Science Academy), the National Academy of Sciences of India and the Indian Botanical Society.

In recognition of his distinguished work in various fields of activity, a number of honours were conferred on him. He was elected President of the Botany Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1953, President of the Indian Botanical Society in 1954 and President of the Indian Phytopathological Society in 1968. He was awarded the Birbal Sahni Memorial Medal in 1967 for outstanding contributions to the progress of Botany in India. He was elected General President of the National Academy of Sciences in the year 1969.

Besides having a brilliant and distinguished scientific career, Prof. Saksena was also a great teacher and humanist. He was ever ready to go out of his way to help persons in difficulties. His sense of humour, affectionate conduct, sweet temper and cooperative attitude made him an extremely popular figure in all gatherings and conferences. He will live in the botanical world not only by the illustrious position which he carved for himself by his brilliant contributions to botany but also through the galaxy of brilliant students which he produced, several of whom are occupying chairs in various universities or are serving in other high positions.

Though Prof. Saksena retired from active service in 1959, he continued to take very lively interest in developments and research in botany till he died suddenly on the 1st of September, 1970. He lived a very full and active life, and is survived by his devoted wife, two sons and two daughters, all of whom are well placed in life. All students of the subject pay their homage to this remarkable doyen who has left an ineffaceable record of services to botany.