

Obituary



Professor Surendra Nath Chaturvedi - a botanist, teacher, mentor and human par excellence

22 April 1926- 20 Feb 2018

Professor Surendra Nath Chaturvedi a fatherly figure and a well known botanist of the country breathed his last on 20th February 2018 around 03:30 hrs leaving his family members, relatives, students, colleagues and admirers in deep sorrow.

On 1st June, 2017 the students, family members and well wishers of Professor Chaturvedi celebrated his 92nd birth day at his residence. The Society of Plant Reproductive Biologists felicitated him by releasing the special volume of its scientific organ The International J. Plant Reproductive Biology dedicated in his honour. The special Felicitation volume was presented to him by Prof. Arvind Dixit, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Agra. He was in a very cheerful mood and receptive as ever. Those present on the occasion could not have imagined that it would be his last birth day. He was mentally fit with sound memory and physically alert before leaving for his long journey to heaven.

One of his students writes that he was in mid-way while delivering his scientific talk in a national workshop at CCS University Meerut when he received the shocking news – a stroke of silence prevailed during the talk before the curious audience for few minutes. Then the speaker requested the participants to observe silence in honour of departed soul in mid-way of his talk – an example of instant reaction to the respect that Prof Chaturvedi commanded.

Prof. Chaturvedi was born in 1926 in the holy city of Mathura. He was brought up under the strict discipline of his father Sri Bisheshwar Dayal

Chaturvedi and elder brother Sri Baikund Nath Chaturvedi. He had his earlier education at Agra. He obtained his degree of MSc in Botany from Agra College, Agra in 1950 under the world famous mycologist Prof. K.C. Mehta, and PhD in 1970 from Agra University for the thesis “Floral anatomy in some members of the family Rosaceae” under the guidance of another well known botanist Dr. Bahadur Singh. He was appointed Assistant Professor in Botany at B.R. College (now R. B. S. College), Agra, in July, 1950 and became Chairman of the Department in 1978, superannuated in June, 1986, and continued as the Honorary Professor at the School of Life Sciences at the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Agra. An excellent teacher who always came well prepared to take his classes supported with the latest references on the subject, Prof. Chaturvedi was equally popular among the students as a guardian who could help shape their professional career. He mentored PhD thesis of 26 scholars, and published over 100 research papers in national and international journals that are well cited, including in reference and text books. Prof. Chaturvedi inspired generation of students for attending and participating in academic activities of various scientific bodies. A good number of his students had acquired high professional distinctions and became Vice-chancellors, Professors in the Universities and senior scientists in National Research Institutes.

Professor Chaturvedi regularly attended national and international conferences and was on the editorial board of several journals; and member of

executive council of various botanical societies. He was Fellow of the Indian Botanical Society, Indian Phytopathological Society, Mendelian Academy of Science, Society of Bioscience, and The Society of Plant Reproductive Biologists. He was elected as the President of Indian Botanical Society in 1992, and was serving as the President of The Society of Plant Reproductive Biologists. For his outstanding and dedicated services for the cause of botanical sciences in the country and energising the activities of the Indian Botanical Society, he was conferred with the Honorary Fellowship and Life Time achievement Award of the Indian Botanical Society. Prof. Chaturvedi was an elected member of the executive council of Agra University for three years.

On learning about the sad demise of Prof. Chaturvedi, condolence meetings were held in several biological departments all over the globe and their condolence messages continued to pour-in in the office of The Society of Plant Reproductive Biologist of which Prof. Chaturvedi was president. Some of them are: Prof. Leonardo Galetto Universidad Nacional de Biología Vegetal, Cordoba, Argentina; Dr. Agnes Farkas, University of Pecs, Pecs, Hungary; Prof. Adriano Valentin da Silva, Institute of Biosciences, Federal University of Goiás, Brazil; Prof. Wolfgang Frey, Berlin, Germany; Prof. Masahiro Kato, National Museum of Nature and Science, Tsukuba, Japan; Dr. Elena N. Muratova; Laboratory of Forest Genetics & Plant Breeding, V.N. Sukachev Institute of Forest, Russian Academy of Sciences, Siberian Branch, Krasnoyarsk, Russia; Prof. Dalbir Singh, Canada; Prof. Galina E. Titova, Komarov Botanical Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia; Dr. Lara Reale, Department of Science Agraria, Alimenta, Perugia, Italy; Dr. Hadj Arab Houria, Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Science and Technology, Algiers, Algeria; Dr. Conxi Rodriguez-Prieto, University of Girona, Department of Environmental Sciences, Spain; Dr. Wen-Liang Chiou, Division of Forest Biology, Taiwan Forest Research Institute, Taipei, Taiwan; Prof. Susanne S. Renner, Department of Biology, University of Munich, Germany; and Prof. Yuji Kishima, Laboratory of Plant Breeding, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan.

Apart from teaching and research, Prof. Chaturvedi shouldered the responsibility of In-charge Games and Sports and N.C.C. officer where he rose to the rank of Major. He was one of the best dressed

teachers in the college and was well known for his strict discipline. Prof. Chaturvedi was well known in social circles of Agra and he was Patron, Rao Krishna Pal Singh Students' Aid society; Secretary, Board of management, R.B.S. College; member of the Balwant Educational Society; President, Lajpat Kunj Resident's association; and Patron of R.B.S. School of cricket. The budding cricketers at this school always celebrated his birth day and chanted "Happy Birth Day to you Sir".

The residence of Prof. Chaturvedi 4, Lajpat Kunj, Civil line, Agra, was a pilgrimage for the botanists coming to Agra and it was famous all over the country for its hospitality. Whenever, there was any occasion of a scientific meeting in Agra, Prof. Chaturvedi took pleasure in hosting lunch at his farm house in the organic surroundings. This is largely due to Smt. Devki Chaturvedi, the daughter of great literary personality of the country Padambhushan Late Sri Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, and the noble son Dr. Nikhil Chaturvedi, a well known Paediatric doctor and carbon copy of his father in social circle.

He was a noble person with all the qualities of a perfect human being. It is difficult to find such a teacher, researcher, educationist, scientist and institution-builder for well over seven decades, and a human par excellence. Invaluable contribution of Prof. Chaturvedi to science and society will be remembered forever. In particular, it is a great loss to The Indian Botanical Society that always looked at him for guidance. In his residence at Agra, he has left a noble legacy in the form his son and daughter –in- law, who are equally supportive of his thoughts and pursuits in action.

Let us all pray almighty that the departed soul of our beloved Guru ji rests in peace, and provide courage to the family members and botanical fraternity to bear this irreparable loss.

S.V.S. Chauhan, F.B.S.

Secretary, The Society of Plant Reproductive Biologists, Academy of Life Sciences, 8/13 I Kaushalpur Bye Pass Road, Agra-282005, India

e-mail: svsc071241@gmail.com