

OBITUARY

Dr. A. K. Ghosh (1938–2018)

“A trip down memory lane is always nostalgic. Fond memories never die, and when recalled come back like images in a kaleidoscope”. This quote of Dr. A.K. Ghosh—the former Director, Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)—was the quintessence of his emotional expressions while addressing his last speech to the ZSI fraternity on 26th January 2018 during the celebration of the 69th Republic Day of India in ZSI. Dr. Asish Kumar Ghosh—more often fondly called as Dr. A.K. Ghosh—left for his heavenly abode on 2nd April 2018 leaving an indelible footprint on this planet through his great contributions as an eminent scientist, scholar and visionary, a renowned taxonomist and environmentalist, and above all a good human being.

Dr. A.K. Ghosh was born in 1938 at Rourkela, Orissa. He had his early education in Orissa and Bihar, and higher academics in Kolkata. After his post-graduation in Zoology from the University of Calcutta, Dr. Ghosh got his doctorate degree from the same university under the guidance of late Dr. D.N. Roychouduri. His taxonomic research at the University of Calcutta on Indian Aphidoidea—a superfamily of small, soft-bodied insect bugs that suck the sap from plants—helped him obtain a Rockefeller Field Grant. Later, he received a Fullbright Post Doctoral Fellowship from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA, for higher studies on long-range dispersal of aphid vectors of plant viruses. On his return to India, he joined the University of Calcutta as a CSIR Pool Officer. Since then Dr. A. K. Ghosh served in different capacities in the academia and the Govt. of India.

Dr. Ghosh's first visit to ZSI was in 1958 during the study period of his post-graduation in Kolkata. Being an avid reader, he used to visit the library of ZSI at the Indian Museum and was amazed to see the vast collection of books. Later, he was very happy to begin his journey of career in ZSI in 1972 when he joined this department, through UPSC selection, as a class I officer, and was posted at the Eastern Regional Station of ZSI, Shillong. He took up the task of setting up a permanent building and other infrastructure—the first ever full-fledged Regional Station of ZSI (presently, known as the Eastern Regional Centre (ERC), ZSI, Shillong). He initiated collaborative joint expedition events, especially the notable ones like the Subansiri Expedition survey jointly conducted by Zoological Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Anthropological Survey of India and Geological Survey of India. Subsequently, on transfer to ZSI, Calcutta, and posted at the Fire Proof Spirit Building (FPS) of ZSI, he officiated as the officer-in-charge of the Fauna of India Unit and the Training & Extension Division of ZSI. He shouldered the responsibility of drafting the action plan and programmes of the department for the 6th Five Year Plan, which he executed in an efficient way. In 1992, succeeding Dr. M.S. Jairajpuri, he took over the reins of the department as the Director, ZSI, and served in that capacity as the Head of this premier research institution till February 1996.

During his tenure as the Director of ZSI, the department has seen significant stages in its development. He enhanced the infrastructure facility of ZSI Headquarters office, faunal repository and research laboratories. The floor space at the Hq. Office cum research building was considerably improved by adding an Annexe Building to the main block of ZSI. An exclusive research centre, namely Marine Aquarium Research Centre was set up at Digha, West Benagal. He initiated the resurvey of the Chilka Lagoon, Odisha after 60 years. A series of monographs and scientific books on Fauna of India, State Fauna Series and also the first Red Data Book of Indian Animals were published.

Dr. Ghosh had the privilege of working with seven earlier Directors of ZSI who were stalwarts in the field of animal science. Dr. Ghosh as a renowned taxonomist was an authority on aphids; he immensely contributed to the taxonomic knowledge on Indian aphids. He has over 400 research papers to his credit. Some of his works like *Aphids of economic importance of India*; *Fauna of India*, Part-1, Part-2; *Aphid Parasitoides of India and adjacent countries* co-authored with P. Stary; *Aphids of North East India and Bhutan with a major interest on Biosystematics of Aphids of India and their natural enemies*, etc. have received wide appreciation among the insect taxonomists in

the country. His last book titled *Fauna of India Homoptera, Aphidoidea*, Part-7(2), co-authored with L.K. Ghosh, brought out at around 80 years of his age, was released by ZSI in December 2017. He was instrumental behind publishing the book titled '*Glorious 100 Women Scientists of ZSI*' by the department, which contained the narratives on the contributions of women scientists in ZSI. The book was released as a special publication on the occasion of Centenary Celebrations of ZSI in 2016.

Dr Ghosh has represented India as the official nominee of Government India in key international forums like the 5th Ramsar Convention in Kushiro, Japan; IUCN General Assembly in Argentina; Bionet in UK; Indo-Russian Forest Treaty in Moscow, USSR and International Congress of Ethnobiology in Mexico City, USA. As a leading biodiversity expert and conservationist, he has represented India in the Convention on Biodiversity at Geneva. He has extensively travelled in Europe delivering key-note speeches and lectures on various aspects of Biodiversity from Indian perspectives. He served National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) as a nominated member for two terms since its inception, and chaired or co-chaired a number of Expert groups' meetings. He has acted as a member of the Environmental appraisal Committee (EAC) for power and industry sector. He has also served as the member of Advisory Committee on Environment to the Planning Commission during the 11th Five Year Plan. In his spare times, Dr. Ghosh actively engaged himself in teaching/guiding researchers or delivering guest lectures at various Universities and IIMs on varied topics of biodiversity, environment and wildlife conservation. He was a visiting faculty at the University of Calcutta and Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal. He was the founder Director, ENDEV, a non-governmental organisation carrying out the field-based socio economic studies and EIAs.

Dr. A.K. Ghosh used to grace the occasions of all important programmes or functions at ZSI with his charming presence. He was always happy to attend the conferences, workshops and Symposia as and when organised by ZSI and to act as a resource person. The National workshop on *Current Status of Invasive Alien Species in India* was the last workshop attended by him in December 2017. On 26th January 2018, the inspiring words of his speech, reminiscing over memories of the past events of his life and journey in ZSI, mesmerised the scientists and staff of ZSI assembled in the ZSI auditorium. And, sadly, those words were his last-offering adieu to the ZSI fraternity. We truly lost a mentor and a great soul!

Late Dr. A.K. Ghosh will be remembered by one and all in ZSI not only for his great things he did for the department as a scientist, administrator and visionary, but also for his qualities as a good human being.