

A. K. Saha – An obituary

Ajit Kumar Saha (1925–1997) could be identified as one of those rare varieties of personalities, whose name was synonymous with total dedication and devotion to science. At least this was the conviction of Saha's countless students, colleagues and admirers, making him a legend among the Indian scientific community. A confirmed bachelor, he was often referred to have been wedded to scientific teaching and research.

Rajshahi town (now in Bangladesh) harboured the ancestral home of the Sahas, a distinguished family of educationists. The father of Ajit, Abinash Chandra Saha, served the Bengal Government in its Education Service, and eventually retired as Professor of Physics from the Presidency College, Calcutta in 1947. Ajit was born in Patna on 25 May 1925 at his maternal grandfather's place. It was quite natural that the spirit of education and research was inherited by young Ajit. His father was in the faculty of Chittagong Government College when Ajit had his early schooling at the Chittagong Municipal School. Here he read up to Class IX, and left for Calcutta in 1939. His father was transferred from Chittagong Government College to Presidency College, Calcutta. Ajit accompanied his father to Calcutta and got admitted in Hindu school in 1939 and passed the Matriculation Examination in 1941 with letter marks in many subjects and standing first among the boys of Hindu School. From 1941 to 1997, for a long 56 years, Ajit Saha had an almost unbroken record of association with the academic atmosphere of College Street area, first with Hindu School, then with the Presidency College, an institution of prestige and honour. Saha did his I Sc (1941–43) securing 13th position, B Sc with Hons.

in Geology (1943–45) standing first class first with record marks in Calcutta University and M Sc in Geology (1945–47) again standing first class first. Subsequently he obtained DPhil degree from the University of Calcutta in 1958 and PhD from Toronto University in Canada (1958) where he stayed for two years.

Saha's professional career started in the Geological Survey of India as a



Geological Assistant. He served the GSI from 1948 to 1951. His true teaching and research activities started in 1951 when he joined the Presidency College as Assistant Professor of Geology and subsequently as Professor of Geology from 1962 to 1990. After his retirement from the Presidency College in 1990, Saha worked in the same Department as CSIR Emeritus Scientist from 1990 to 1993.

Saha was busy planning, along with some of his eminent colleagues and friends, to establish a non-Government organization with growing needs of the country in mind, particularly those of West Bengal, to tackle the ever-increasing pollution problems. With the sustained effort of his colleagues, he played a leading role. The Center for Study of Man and Environment was established in 1978. The prestigious position he occupied until the day of his expiry was held with great capability, unstinted faith and high degree of quality.

Over 40 years of professional approach, he covered varieties of related and unrelated disciplines like pre-Cambrian stratigraphy, geo-chemistry, petrol-chemistry, application of statistical techniques on geology and lately intensive studies on various aspects of environmental pollution. He won several laurels.

Several students obtained their PhD degrees under his supervision in subjects ranging from pre-Cambrian geology to various aspects of environmental science.

With the passing away of Saha, an area of scientific excellence has come to an end, creating a void which will be difficult to fill. The scientific community of India will fondly remember him with great affection and admiration.

Saha passed away after a brief illness in the early hours of 27 April 1997.

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