

Ajay Singh (1926–2017)



Dr. Ajay Singh, a pioneer lichenologist of India, born on 13th November 1926 was among the five children to his parents Shri Bindeshwari Prasad Singh and Smt. Chandra Raj Kumari. He originally belongs to Regaon, a village in Madhya Pradesh, but born and brought in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. He had his early education from Udai Pratap College, Varanasi; Graduation from Allahabad University, Allahabad, and Post Graduation from Lucknow University, Lucknow. He married to Smt. Savitri Singh on 21st May 1948 at Varanasi.

Dr. Singh during early years (precisely seven) of his professional career taught botany at Shia Degree College, Lucknow. He is known for establishing Lichen Research Laboratory at CSIR-National Botanical Research Institute Lucknow (National Botanical Garden earlier). He joined this institute on 10th February 1958 as Junior Scientific Assistant and superannuated as Scientist E1 on 19th May 1982.

Initially for two years he worked on higher plants but later switched over to the field of lichenology. To create a base for lichenological research he gathered huge literature on Indian lichens scattered all over the world and compiled the information in a book 'Lichens of India' in the year 1964 with list of approximately 1300 species. He also compiled the lichenological progress made in India between the years 1966-1977. Dr. Singh primarily worked on foliicolous lichens and later completed his PhD from Lucknow University, Lucknow on "Morpho-taxonomic studies on the lichen genus *Anthracothecium* and allied genera from Indian subcontinent" under the able guidance of Dr. D.D. Awasthi. He published a detailed account of the genus *Anthracothecium* and allied genera. Later in year 1982, Dr. D.K. Upreti joined him as Senior Research Fellow and both worked on the taxonomic studies of lichen genera *Endocarpon*, *Opegrapha*, *Parmenaria*, *Pleurotheliopsis* and *Porina*. After superannuation from CSIR-NBRI he joined National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property (NRLC), Lucknow as Principal Investigator in a Department of Science & Technology, New Delhi sponsored project, to study the role of lichens in biodeterioration of monuments and historical buildings of the country.

During his career Dr. Singh discovered 42 species of lichens new to science, two new varieties and made seven new combinations. He published three books and about 50 research papers which also included some articles on angiosperm. Beyond his professional career, he developed interest in the study of Indology, especially the ancient period of Indian history. Literature on ancient Indian history, mythology, religion, scriptures, ancient Indian thoughts (philosophy and science) and archaeology and published a book entitled "Plants in Ancient Indian Civilization", published by Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi.

Dr. Singh, a knowledgeable scientist, thorough gentleman, kind hearted person with ethics and compassion left for heavenly adobe on 8th June 2017 at the age of 91 years.

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