

## **Professor Ramdeo Misra** (26 August 1908-25 June 1999)

Born on 26 August 1908 in Jaunpur district (U.P.), young Ramdeo Misra had his early education in Banaras and obtained his B.Sc. and M.Sc. (Botany) degrees from Banaras Hindu University. Young Misra joined as Lecturer in Botany but soon went to England where he was initiated into ecology by late Professor W. H. Pearsall under whose guidance he worked for his Ph.D. degree of the University of Leeds (1938). Dr Misra demonstrated the importance of edaphic factors in controlling the growth and distribution of macrophytes in English Lakes. This classical study is widely referred to even today. Returning to India, Dr Misra made extensive studies on the vegetation of upper Gangetic Plains and pioneered the experimental approach in ecology. He surveyed and classified the aquatic, marsh and terrestrial plant communities and described their environmental relationships. Later, Dr Misra established an active school of ecology at Sagar (M.P.) where during the stay of a few years (1946-54) as Reader and Head of the newly started Department of Botany, he studied both the forests and the grasslands. Among several of his Ph.D. students at Sagar, notable were Prof. S.C. Pandeya and Prof. L.P. Mall who contributed greatly to ecology and environmental science and established important schools at Saurashtra University, Rajkot and Vikram University, Ujjain, respectively. Later, Dr Misra returned to his alma mater, Banaras Hindu University as Professor and Head of the Botany Department (1954-71) where he continued as Professor Emeritus until his death. Professor Misra founded the vibrant, now-internationally recognized centre of ecology. During his leadership of over 25 years, the studies of the Banaras School ranged from those on plant populations at ecotype level to those on forests and grasslands at the ecosystem level. A detailed study of the tropical deciduous forest ecosystem under the aegis of MAB project 1 was undertaken during the late 1970s. About 60 students obtained their Ph.D degree under the supervision of Professor Misra and many of them occupy important positions today. Trained at the Sagar or the Banaras Schools young ecologists have spread out to various universities or research institutes establishing several growing centres spread out to various universities or research institutes establishing several growing centres of ecological research and training. The introduction of ecology in biology courses of Indian Universities and their continual improvement to keep in tune with the latest developments has been largely due to the efforts of Professor Misra. He organized several short-term schools on ecology for teachers; participated in, chaired or organized a large number of national and international seminars and symposia. Recently, he inspired and chaired a seminar on Teaching of Ecology and Environmental Sciences in India (1976), which formulated a programme of education in ecology for professional courses, administrators, planners and also for non-formal education, and resolved to establish the interdisciplinary organisation, the National Institute of Ecology.

Professor, Misra received world-wide recognition for his contributions and held prominent positions internationally. He was associated with the PT section of the International Biological Programme (1964-72) and introduced studies in production ecology in India. He was involved from the very beginning of discussions that led to the launch of the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere programme in 1972, and was elected one of the Vice-Presidents of the first Bureau of its International Coordinating Council. At the same time, during 1967-68, he got involved into another group that was responsible for the establishment of the International Association of Ecology in 1972, and was asked to serve on the first Board of the INTECOL. He was closely associated with the UN Environment Programme that was also started in 1972 soon after the Stockholm Conference, and its multidirectional activities. He was one of the senior consultants to UNEP for the Conference on Desertification. He represented India for several years on the UNESCO's MAB-ICC, and participated in numerous UNESCO activities. He was also a member of the jury of Institute de la Vie (Paris) prize, and served on numerous Governmental and non-

governmental committees concerned with ecology and environment in India. Most importantly, he was invited to be a Member of the National Committee on Environmental Planning and Coordination, set up by the Government of India under the chairmanship of later Dr Pitambar Pant to prepare India's contribution to the United Nations Conference on Human Environment – the Stockholm Conference (1972).

Professor Misra contributed significantly to several other scientific bodies. He was associated with the formation of the Indian Council of Ecological Research and its journal, *Indian Ecologist*, both of which somehow did not last long. Later, he was a moving force, jointly with Dr. G.S. Puri (another student of Prof. W.H. Pearsall) and Dr F.R. Fosberg (Smithsonian Institution, USA), in the establishment of the International Society for Tropical Ecology. He Served as its Treasurer and President, and also as the chief editor of its journal, *Tropical Ecology*. He was also the chief editor of the *International Journal of Ecology & Environmental Sciences* which he initiated in 1974, with the major objective of bringing together ecological researches from the developing countries. He also served on the Editorial Board of several journals including *Agroecosystems* and *Applied Ecology Abstracts*.

Professor Misra was duly recognized for his pioneering contributions to ecology and laying its foundation on a firm ground. He received several honours and awards. He was elected a Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy, National Academy of Sciences and of the World Academy of Arts and Science. He presided over the Indian Botanical Society, Botany section of the Indian Science Congress Association and the Biological Sciences section of the National Academy of Sciences. In recognition of his outstanding services to Indian Botany in general, and ecology in particular, the Indian Botanical Society honoured him with the Birbal Sahni Gold Medal (1966) and the Madhya Pradesh Vigyan Academy awarded him the Jawaharlal Nehru Gold Medal. Later, he received the Sanjay Gandhi Environment Award (1984).

Professor Misra published more than 150 research and review papers, numerous general articles, and authored or edited 10 books. He kept himself updated with the latest developments in ecology and contributed articles to many journals and bulletins until his demise in June 1999.

We the students, grand-students, great-grand-students, friends, and admirers pay our tributes to the a great teacher, an noble kind-hearted man, and a great ecologist whose life and contributions shall continue to inspire and guide us for decades to come.