

Mahendra Nath Bose (1925–2011)

Mahendra Nath Bose, a former Director of the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany (BSIP), Lucknow and an internationally known scientist, passed away peacefully on 27 April 2011 at Gurgaon, Haryana. It was a great loss to his many admirers in the field of palaeobotany, botany and geology. He was equally at ease with living and fossil plants.

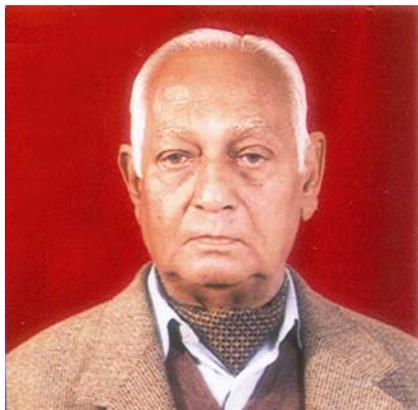
Bose was born on 3 March 1925 at Jainagar-Majilpur, West Bengal to Satyendra Nath and Suprabha Bose as the elder of two siblings. His brother A. N. Bose, is a renowned physical chemist. His ancestors were from a renowned Bengali family of Lucknow and his almost six generations lived in this city of Nawabs. Young Bose had his schooling in Lucknow's Queens Anglo Bengali School and passed his B Sc (1944) and M Sc (1946) in botany from Lucknow University. He was greatly influenced by the late Birbal Sahni, and joined him as Research Assistant for his Ph D in botany. Unfortunately, Sahni passed away in 1949 and Bose completed his Ph D under R. V. Sitholey in 1953. In 1951, Bose got married to Smritikona who was very supportive in all his endeavours.

Bose joined the Institute of Palaeobotany founded by the late Birbal Sahni in 1949 as a Lecturer, became Reader in 1956, Assistant Director in 1961 and finally its Director in 1985. His major contribution has been on the Mesozoic palaeobotany of India and Mesozoic and Palaeozoic palaeobotany of Zaire. His studies on the fossil flora led to a revision of the classification of the Lukuga Group. His immense work on the Mesozoic flora of India coupled with palynological data shed further light on the precise Mesozoic stratigraphy of India. He also worked on the Lower Cretaceous of the Arctic region and made significant contributions to the fossil Clitellate cocoons and Psilophyte? like leaves. His monograph on Indian species of Ptilophyllum, Otozamites, Weltrichia, Dictyozamites and Mesozoic flora of Kachch is a landmark in the field of palaeobotany, well quoted by palaeobotanists the world over.

After retirement from the Sahni Institute in 1985, Bose joined the Geology

Department of the University of Oslo, Norway and remained an active researcher until 1990.

Bose was deeply influenced by some of the famous and prominent palaeobotanists besides Birbal Sahni. He received research guidance from several internationally acclaimed scientists, including T. M. Harris, Reading, UK; O. H. Sellings, Ricks Museum, Stockholm, and Ove Arbo Hoeg, University of Oslo.



During his long tenure as Head of the Department of Mesozoic Palaeobotany (1955–80) at BSIP, Bose guided many Ph D students who later made significant contributions in the field of Mesozoic palaeobotany and palynology. These include S. K. Roy, K. P. Jain, Sukh Dev, M. L. Kasat, Shyam C. Srivastava, P. Pal and B. N. Jana. With his vast team of students and associates, Bose undertook several excursions to collect fossil plants to study geological information leading to many new discoveries in Indian Mesozoic palaeobotany. Many new fossil localities were discovered and their studies gave a comprehensive and precise picture of Mesozoic palaeobotany, such as Jurassic–Lower Cretaceous and Triassic. In short, he was instrumental in creating a strong base for research in Mesozoic palaeobotany and for putting BSIP on the world map of this branch of palaeobotany.

Bose undertook important expeditions in India, besides Mesozoic fossiliferous localities. To mention a few, he went up to Pindari Glacier, Rupkund with anthropology experts, to Spiti (with Hoeg) in

the quest of early land plants, to Jongri Sikkim Himalayas with Japanese scientists, to Spits Bergen along with Norwegian scientists and to Zaire with African geologists. Way back in 1964, I was an M Sc student at Lucknow University, and had an opportunity to see some of the beautiful and colourful transparencies of living and fossil plants from Spits Bergen. Bose also collected fossil and living plants in England, France, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Tunisia and Nigeria and generously donated these precious specimens to BSIP.

He chaired many sessions of various international and national conferences, and delivered many invited lectures at various universities and institutes in India and abroad. Bose was a correspondent for Palaeoecology of Africa for a considerable time. He was elected a fellow, correspondent or member of various academies, societies and committees: the Indian Academy of Sciences, Indian National Science Academy, Palaeobotanical Society, National Working Group for IGPC, Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and Belgium Royal Academy of Sciences.

Bose was a strict disciplinarian and a cultured gentleman; he lived a life full of achievements and honours. He was a dedicated student and took keen interest in his subject until the end. He was known for his mannerisms, discipline, gentle behaviour and punctuality, and expected the same from his students and subordinates. He had a special liking for plants and it was a treat to see his beautiful garden full of some rare plants.

Although Bose settled down in Gurgaon during the last six years of his life, he visited Lucknow as often as possible. When I visited him in April this year at Gurgaon, he was critically ill, yet he talked mainly about the welfare of BSIP.

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