

# Prof. Narendra Mohan Basu

## An Unremembered Physiologist

As a painstaking researcher, a successful teacher and a good organiser Professor Narendra Mohan Basu devoted his entire life for the betterment of the subject of Physiology. He was a distinguished physiologist whose 125th birth anniversary was celebrated recently.

Born on 29 April 1891 at Midnapore in West Bengal, Prof. N.M. Basu became a Professor of Physiology in Presidency College and City College, Calcutta. He was always a very meritorious student.

After his M.Sc., Prof. Basu joined as a Research Assistant in the Physiology Department of Presidency College. He was very fortunate because at that time Acharya J. C. Bose was doing his research. Sir J.C. Bose used to send papers of Keith Lucas to him for making summaries for the *Transaction of Royal Society*, England. Acharya Bose was so pleased with this summaries that as soon as he was relieved from the post of Research Assistant in the college, he took him as a Research Assistant under himself. Prof. Basu was given a research scholarship of Rs. 100/- p.m.

Prof. S. C. Mahalanobis was the founder of the Physiology Department in Presidency College and also the founder of Physiology studies as a basic science in the Calcutta University. He entrusted Prof. Basu with the charge of managing the department and coming with the complete syllabus of practical work of I.Sc. and B.Sc. students of both Pass and Hons. examination.

Prof. Basu maintained contact with internationally renowned

physiologists Prof. Starling and also the Nobel Laureate Prof. A.V. Hill to discuss the various aspects of physiological research. He tried to apply his knowledge of Physiology to the improvement of the general health of the people. He also worked on the action of venom on the heart and also on strychnine and falling heart, with minimal equipment. He also did research on human blood, vitamins, ions like calcium, potassium, neurohormones, human fatigue, etc.

Prof. Basu is also known for his work on stored rice in Bengal godowns and demonstrated the effect of humidity and high temperature on amino-nitrogen content of rice in incubated condition.



Prof. Basu also worked hard to introduce physiology in general education. He formed a committee in the Indian Science Congress along with Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. He became the president of the section of Physiology, ISCA two times in Lahore (1939) and in Calcutta (1943).

Prof. Basu was outstanding as a teacher. During his stint at the Presidency College, students from other science departments of the college and also from other colleges and Calcutta University would be very interested to listen to his special lectures.

He was very close to Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee during his student life. During his M.Sc., he stayed at Mechua Bazar mess in Calcutta with other poor students. When the university grant was not available at that time, Prof. Basu requested Sir Mukherjee, V.C. of Calcutta University, who immediately sanctioned the grant.

Prof. N.M. Basu was the moving spirit behind introduction of Physiology as one of the sections in the proposed National Institute of Sciences in India, the idea of which was conceived in the Indian Science Congress session in Bombay in 1934. Prof. Meghnad Saha asked Prof. Basu to establish a Physiological Society in India in December 1934. The society was registered through the initiative of Prof. Basu. He also introduced Physiology as a separate section in the Indian Science Congress.

Prof. N.M. Basu published about 60 research papers on different aspects of Physiology related to blood, biochemistry, hormone, drug, etc. He encouraged younger scientists also to publish their contributions in their own names.

Prof. N. M. Basu was a fellow of INSA. He was also honoured as a fellow by the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Prof. Basu was also a great patriot. He had cordial relations with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose who was six years younger to N. M. Basu. Actually, Prof. Basu's residence was the centre of the freedom fight movement in the district of Midnapore. For this reason the Calcutta residence of Prof. Basu was surrounded by the officers of IB.

He had close relations with the Swadeshis in the period 1932-1933 when Magistrate Peddy, Burge and Douglas were murdered. Swadeshi books and magazines were stored at a secret place in his house.

During the last phase of his life, he was unable to work but his mind was strong and agile. He would discuss important matters with students who used to visit him occasionally. On his eightieth birth anniversary in April 1980, he told them: "In the last phase of my life, I would not long for reputation or glory nor shall I seek recognition from others. I shall remain fixed and unmoved in my temple of learning. This is my definite resolve."

Prof. Basu died on 17th August 1980 in Calcutta.

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