

## P.N. Srivastava Award 2003



### Introduction by Dr. Jayasri Banerji

This is my humble duty to introduce Dr. R.C. Mehrotra, the recipient of Dr P.N. Srivastava Award 2003. The award was instituted in the year 1971 in the memory of late Dr. P.N. Srivastava, a well-known scientist of the institute, who died in a tragic accident during his fieldwork. The award includes a gold medal as well as a citation and is given for the best piece of research work carried out during the last two years, excluding the year of award. The selection is done on the basis of the recommendations of an expert committee constituted by the Chairman and the Director of the institute.

Dr. Mehrotra was born in a small town Nazibabad situated in the Bijnor District of Uttar Pradesh. He got his basic education in Faizabad, while the later part of his education was completed in Lucknow. He has a good academic record and received his M.Sc. Degree in Botany from Lucknow University in 1979. Just after obtaining this degree he joined the institute as a Research Scholar in Nov., 1980. He was placed in the then Tertiary Department, where he was given a regular job in March, 1981 at the post of the Junior Scientific Assistant. At the time of his appointment as J.S.A., he was placed in the newly constituted Cenophytic Evolutionary Botany Department where he was awarded Ph.D. degree in 1986 on the Deccan Intertrappean flora of India. He also got a Certificate of Proficiency in French in 1981. Till date he has received four promotions in the institute in the years 1984, 1988, 1996 and 2001 as Senior Scientific Assistant, Junior Scientific Officer, Senior Scientific Officer (Scientist C) and Scientist D respectively. At present he is engaged in a project entitled, "Palaeofloristics, evolutionary trends and palaeoenvironment of Late Cretaceous-Cenozoic Basin." His specialization is on the morphotaxonomy of plant megafossils of the Tertiary Period. Since 1987 he has been working in Northeast India where he has visited many times and collected

a good number of fossils from various old and new localities. He described many new taxa from there in order to enrich the palaeofloristics of the region. Dr. Mehrotra participated in many national and international conferences and has more than 50 research papers to his credit in many reputed national and international journals.

Dr. Mehrotra fully deserves the award conferred to him on 14th Nov., 2003 for his work on the estimation of pCO<sub>2</sub> on the basis of cuticular studies in the leaf of *Terminalia catappa* of Combretaceae collected from the Plio-Pleistocene sediments of the West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh.

I wish him a great success.

### Response by Dr. R.C. Mehrotra

While doing my M.Sc. in Botany from the Lucknow University situated in the neighbourhood of the institute, I often used to pass through the institute gate on my way to the university and at that time I never thought that one day I would join this prestigious institution which is famous all over the world for its high quality research. During those days palaeobotany was considered as the most boring and dull subject by the students of my class but the very existence of fossils always fascinated me and, therefore, after obtaining the M.Sc. Degree I joined the institute as a Research Scholar. I was asked to work on the Deccan Intertrappean flora of India for my Ph.D. Degree under the able guidance of Dr. U. Prakash, an eminent and internationally famous Tertiary palaeobotanist. I am extremely grateful to my ex Head of the Department, Dr. R.N. Lakhanpal, for his valuable suggestions and support throughout the progress of my thesis. After being awarded Ph.D. degree, I continued to work on the same flora for few more years. One day my then Head of the Department, Dr. N. Awasthi, suggested me to wind up my work on the intertrappean flora and offered me to work with him on the

Tertiary flora of northeast India. I immediately agreed to his proposal as not much palaeobotanical work had been done in the region. I had a long association with him and learnt a lot of things from him. Together we discovered several rich fossiliferous localities that are still yielding a good number of fossils.

I always got the support of my colleagues working in the same as well as other projects of the institute. I am thankful to Drs. S.K. Bera and Madhav Kumar for accompanying me several times during my fieldwork. My special thanks are for Dr. Mandaokar for collecting the fossil material for me during his fieldwork. I can not forget to mention the names of Prof. R.P. Tiwari of the Pachhunga University College, Mizoram and Dr. Ashutosh Joshi of the Geological Survey of India, Lucknow for having faith in my abilities as they provided me their valuable collection of fossil plants for investigation. I am grateful to Prof. A.K. Sinha, the former Director of the Institute, not only for permitting me to work with him, but also for encouraging me for such collaborations. I am deeply indebted to Prof. David Dilcher of Florida University, U.S.A. for encouraging me to work on the cuticular aspects of the

fossils which are not only useful in confirming the identification of the fossils but also in interpreting the palaeoclimate and estimation of  $pCO_2$ .

I am extremely grateful to the Chairman of the Governing Body of the Institute for presenting me Dr. P.N. Srivastava Award 2003. I express my gratitude to the committee members who nominated me for this award. It would not have been possible for me to achieve it without the help of the co-authors of my research papers. In this regard I am especially thankful to Dr. Rajni Tewari for extending her help.

I am also thankful to Dr. J.S. Guleria, the Project Co-ordinator, for his help in the routine scientific and administrative matters enabling me to carry out my research work smoothly. Thanks are also due to my lab mates (Drs. Mahesh Prasad, Rashmi Srivastava and E.G. Khare) who are always helpful to me in my day to day work. I am also thankful to the administrative and technical staff of the institute for their co-operation. At last but not the least I am thankful to my better half and daughter for their continuous support, as without which it was not possible for me to get this coveted award. This award would always inspire me to do my best for the institute.