

Chandra Dutt Pant Award 1999



Introduction by Prof Anshu K. Sinha

IT is my great pleasure to introduce Dr Mahesh Prasad as the recipient of the Chandra Dutt Pant Medal 1999. The award consists of a Medal and a Citation. Chandra Dutt Pant Medal was instituted in 1952 to motivate and recognise excellence in research in the field of palaeobotany. The selection is made on the recommendations of Expert Committee constituted by the Chairman and Director of Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany (BSIP) for carrying out best piece of research work during the three years, preceding the year of award.

Mahesh was born on 1.9.1957 at a small town Uska Bazar in Sidharth Nagar District of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and had his early education there. He has a consistently good academic career. He had his secondary education at Anand Nagar, in Gorakhpur District, UP and graduated with Biology and post-graduate in Botany having plant pathology as a special paper at Balrampur District, UP. He completed proficiency course in French language at the Lucknow University in 1983.

Dr Prasad started his research career as a Junior Research Fellow under CSIR project in the Department of Botany, MLK Postgraduate College, Balrampur, where he worked on the plant megafossils from the Siwalik sediments of Koilabas area, in western Nepal, about 50 km towards north of Balrampur, UP.

He joined BSIP in May 1981 as a Junior Scientific Assistant (JSA). Since then he has been working on Siwalik palaeoflora under supervision of Dr U. Prakash, the then Dy. Director, BSIP and obtained PhD degree in 1987 for "Studies on the plant fossils from the Siwalik Group". He has worked on the morphotaxonomy and anatomy of the plant megafossils collected from the Himalayan foot hills of India, Nepal and Bhutan in order to built up palaeofloristics, palaeoecology/

palaeoclimate and phytogeography of the Himalayan region. During the course of his studies he has generated a considerable palaeobotanical data.

This work was further supported through a sponsored project entitled "Vegetational history of the Siwalik Group in the foot hills of Uttar Pradesh, India" sanctioned to him under young scientist scheme by DST, New Delhi in 1987. Almost at the same time, he worked actively on the plant fossils from different places in the Nepal Siwaliks from 1986-1992 under a collaborative project with Dr G. Corvinus, University of Erlangen, Germany. Through several field trips, over the period of years to the different places in the Himalayan foot hills of India and Nepal, he made extensive collection of fossil plants. Most of them recorded for the first time and have significantly been used in interpreting the palaeoclimate and phytogeography of the regions. He has published more than 35 research papers in both national and international journals on various aspects of Cenophytic Evolutionary Botany.

Chandra Dutt Pant Medal 1999 has been awarded to him specially for his significant contributions on the morphotaxonomy and anatomy of Siwalik plant fossils (woods, leaves, fruits, seeds and flowers) including their biostratigraphical, palaeoecological and phytogeographical importance. Presently he is actively engaged in a significant Thrust Area of the institute "Petroliferous basins of India". Recently he has started work on Siwalik paleosols in order to know its stable carbon isotopic compositions and their relation to C3/C4 plants and climate. He has also been awarded a certificate of commendation during XVI Convention of Indian Association of Sedimentologists for the poster presentation of his research paper entitled "Plant fossils from Siwalik sediments of Tanakpur area in the Himalayan foot hills of Uttar Pradesh and their palaeoclimatic implications".

I know him very well through his outstanding research work on Siwaliks and I always encourage him for devoting more time and energy on his research work. In fact, Mahesh deserves the honour which he has achieved. I feel proud of him and wish him all the success in his future research work.

I will indeed be very happy if Dr Prasad continues his study as such and make outstanding contributions in his chosen area of research.

Response by Dr Mahesh Prasad

I am deeply grateful to have been selected for Chandra Dutt Pant Medal 1999 and would like to express my appreciation and thanks to all of those who helped to make this event happen, I am indeed deeply honoured. Like most of us I have benefited greatly from a number of stimulating colleagues. I take this opportunity to say something about the major points in my love affair with the subject of Palaeobotany. My budding interest in palaeobotany was nurtured at MLK, Postgraduate College, Balrampur, UP when I was postgraduate student. After getting MSc degree in 1979, I joined as a research scholar in this college. Later on, a project on Siwalik palaeobotany was sanctioned to me by CSIR, which became a constant source of interest in my palaeobotanical research. Dr P.P. Tripathi, my thesis supervisor, had been a source of inspiration, I am grateful to him for introducing me to BSIP which is the best research centre of palaeobotany in India. During my research career at MLK College, I first visited Siwalik plant fossil locality around Koilabas in western Nepal. My fascination on palaeobotany intensified further when I joined as Junior Research Assistant in the Cenozoic Department of BSIP in 1981 and fortunately enough, I was assigned the research work on the theme of Siwalik Palaeobotany. It gave me a chance to study morphotaxonomy of leaf fossils and anatomy of woods from the Siwalik sediments of Koilabas, western Nepal and

Kalagarh, UP respectively. The data thus generated was utilised to build up the palaeofloristics and palaeoclimate of the Himalayan foot hills. In 1987, I submitted my PhD dissertation on the same theme and was awarded degree by the Lucknow University.

Two decades ago, when I joined BSIP, there was a very little work on Siwalik plant fossils and also the most of the fossil localities were untouched. I had to devote time on the collection as well as investigation of plant fossils from different Siwalik fossiliferous localities of both India and Nepal. My humble pursuit generated considerable palaeobotanical data on the Siwaliks which is being used to deduce different palaeobotanical inferences.

In this context I must say that I have been very fortunate with my teachers, supervisors research colleagues as well as collaborators. In fact they are the part of my success to get this award. I would like to thank my parents, wife and other family members especially my eldest brother and his wife who motivated in this endeavour.

I wish to thank Professor Anshu K. Sinha, Director, BSIP for his constant encouragement and keen interest during progress of work. I am indebted to the Chairman of Governing Body and Research Advisory Council of BSIP, members of Expert Committee to evaluate my work for this award. Lastly, I assure you all that this award will always motivate me to make further valuable contributions on Siwalik plant fossils as well as paleosols.

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