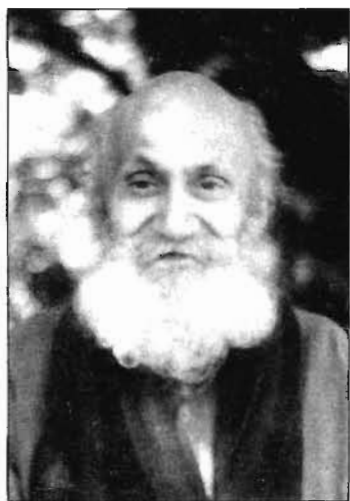


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## Professor S.D. Saksena

(April, 1909-October, 1995)

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PROFESSOR S.D. SAKSENA  
(APRIL, 1909-OCTOBER, 1995)

What makes a man bigger than the life? His ethos?, his pahas? or his achievements in profession, wealth, fame, family, and social prestige? Probably something above and far beyond all these worldly parameters of success, Dr Shiv Dayal Saksena achieved a greatness much bigger than the life. A high profile Palaeobotanist of his time, a systematist in all walks of life, a Gandhian thinker and a truthful practitioner, a lover of nature and humanity, an educationist, a beloved and highly revered teacher, and a humane up to the last drop of his personality, all we lost in the sad demise of Professor Saksena on October 31, 1995 at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh.

Professor Shiv Dayal was one of the most outstanding students of the great teacher Professor Birbal Sahni, FRS. When the Foundation of the science of fossil plants was being laid at the Botany Department of the Lucknow University during the early first-half of the present century, Professor Saksena was one of the few torch-bearers for the great cause, under the inimitable guidance of Professor Sahni.

Born on April 16, 1909 at Sanjari Village in Durg District, Madhya Pradesh, Shiv Dayal received his early education at Raipur, Govindgarh, Rewa and

Allahabad. In 1929, he joined Lucknow University where he topped in his Degree examination. Professor Sahni, a master in talent-searching, could not miss Shiv Dayal's spark. So also Shiv Dayal was charmed by Sahni's brilliancy and charismatic personality. The result was obvious. Shiv Dayal opted to study Botany for his Masters Degree, in which he topped, and then did his Ph.D. under the supervision of Professor Sahni.

However, subsequently on a special invitation and persuasion by Sir Gulab Singh Ju Dev—the then Maharaja of Rewa, in 1935 Shiv Dayal left Lucknow for Rewa where he organized the Department of Botany at the famous Durbar College. But the burning desire to continue research in palaeobotany at the feet of his great Guru Professor Sahni, and so also Sahni's affection with the able and noble student, brought Shiv Dayal back to Lucknow in 1947, to work as a Research Fellow under a project of the Burma Oil Company. By this time, the Palaeobotanical Society was founded and the blue print for the organization of the Institute of Palaeobotany was adopted by the Society. S.D. Saksena was one of the Founder Members of The Palaeobotanical Society. However, destined as it was Professor Saksena could not continue the work at the Institute due to personal reasons, and again he left for Rewa.

Professor Saksena richly contributed to the knowledge of morphology and distribution of plant megafossils from South Rewa Gondwana Basin—the well-known Ganjara Nalla Section. His pioneer work on reconstructions of several plants of the Glosopteris flora, the range charts of their distribution, the concept on the division of Gondwana Sequence whether bi- or tri-partite, and palynology of the Permian sediments from central India were the landmark contributions in the history of Palaeobotany in India. Besides, he wrote several books on Botany, Palaeobotany, agriculture and gardening. He was honoured for his book on Palaeobotany in Hindi by the Bihar Rajbhasha Samiti.

Professor Saksena was associated with several contemporary academies and societies : as a founder member of the Plant Morphology Society, The Palaeobotanical Society and The Indian Botanical Society; as a Life Member of Indian Science Congress Society and Indian Farmers Association. In 1975, Professor Saksena was elected as the President of The Palaeobotanical Society.

Aware as he was about the deteriorating situation of the environment, lately he established a Society for Study, Survey and Conservation of Nature. This society continues to work on various aspects of environment, pollution and protection of natural harmony.

In 1964, after serving as Professor, Dean, and Principal at several educational institutions in Madhya Pradesh, S.D. Saksena retired from active Government Service as Principal of Bareilly College, Bhopal Region. Yet his active and purposeful contributions in the field of education did not come to a halt, rather he got more free time, relieved of administrative responsibilities, to propagate knowledge in a wider perspective and need of the country. As a National Vice-President of the Vidya Bharti and President of the Saraswati Siksha Parishad of Madhya Pradesh, Dr Saksena continued to guide several programmes of children education at grass-root level. To serve humanity at the front of health his charity dispensary of homeopathy medicines continued for about forty years. He was closely associated with the Diabetes Association of India and had developed expertise in the treatment of diabetes through naturopathy.

During the last four decades of his life, social service was the major activity of Professor Saksena. In 1978, he established a Public Welfare Trust and donated to it a part of his land located in the Civil Lines of Rewa City. This Trust provides hostel facilities for poor students, a house for old and destitute people and a homeopathy dispensary. The expenses of the Trust are met with from the rent of seven shops constructed in the premises of the Trust.

He was a Philosopher and an ardent follower of Gandhi—simplicity in life, truthfulness of purpose, non-violence in speech and act, deep understanding of all religions and high moral values were his decorations. During pre 1947 period prompted by the na-

tional movement, he dressed in Churidar Pyajama, Sherwani and a Gandhi Cap. Probably, Professor Sahni, Professor T.S. Mahabale and Professor Shiv Dayal Saksena had taken a vow for Swadeshi during the same period.

First time in 1959, I came in close contact with Professor Saksena, when I was studying for my M.Sc. Final in the faculty of Botany at Hamidia College, Bhopal. He was a gem of a man. Later I could understand that most of the teaching techniques and personal attributes were imbibed by him from his Guru Professor Birbal Sahni; crisp and clear method of conveying complicated subject in a simple way, marvellously drawn, neatly-labelled diagrams invoking the interest of student in the subject, and perfection in every act attracting the minds of young students, were his great qualities. His smile in a subtle way and his soft spoken style of telling things carried deep meaning. He could convey his ideas, including criticism on any issue if required, in a few words with penetrating sense but with a kind gesture.

The death of Professor Shiv Dayal Saksena has created a void in the continuity between the earliest generation of palaeobotanists and the present one, in the country. The educationists will miss his able guidance and his long time friends, associates and students will never be able to fill the gap created by his passing away. For us the scientists at the BSIP, Lucknow, Professor Saksena's house at Rewa was a home away from home. Every excursion party passing through Rewa would make it a point to visit his house. A small comfortable house located in the plot of ten acres of land in the heart of the city, the luxuriant vegetation—the guavas, plums, mangoes, and all sorts of fresh vegetables, a big well, a canopy of trees, a temple with a yoga hall, the fields growing wheat, gram and a heaven for birds. All cosyness of nature and above all Professor Saksena's warm, loving hospitality one can never forget and one who has experienced will ever miss him. He was an embodiment of virtues, nobility, scientific attitude, humanity and a true lover of nature—a man bigger than the life itself.

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