Obituary: Prof. Amalesh Choudhury (1931–2020)

Samiran Chakrabarti¹ · Ashim Kumar Nath²

Published online: 21 July 2021

© Zoological Society, Kolkata, India 2021

Abstract Prof Amalesh Choudhury expired on December 30, 2020 in Kolkata. He will be remembered by his students as an excellent teacher and the scientific fraternity as a dedicated mangrove biologist and ecologist of Sundarbans delta.

Prof Amalesh Choudhury, an excellent teacher in Zoology and Parasitology and particularly a mangrove biologist and

ecologist of Sundarbans delta left for heavenly abode on December 30, 2020 in Kolkata at the age of 89 after a brief period of illness due to COVID infection. Prof. Choudhury had initiated ecological research on the Sundarbans in the sixties and discovered the natural variability in biological interactions as well as studied both biological and physical factors that maintain diversity of the fauna in this region. He also worked on the endangered ecosystems. He was a very active researcher from the dawn of his career till his last days.

Born on 11th July, 1931, Prof. Choudhury grew up with his schooling in Katihar, Bihar. He was then admitted to a college in Rangpur, now in Bangladesh, for his Intermediate studies which he could not continue due to partition of India. He then shifted to Kolkata and took admission to City College where he studied till his graduation and subsequently completed his M. Sc in 1952 from the University of Calcutta. He had worked under the supervision of the Legendary Protozoologist, Professor Mukunda Murari Chakravorty of the University of Calcutta for the D. Phil. Degree.

Prof. Choudhury started his teaching career in Amta College, Howrah and then for a brief period in the City College, Bengal Veterinary College at Belgachia and Bangabasi College, Kolkata. He continued his research from the small research laboratory of Bangabasi College and even ventured to supervise a few students for their Ph. D. from this undergraduate college at that time. During this period, Prof. Choudhury visited the Sundarbans delta, particularly Sagar Island and the nearby islands with his students several times, either for educational tours or for collection of his own research materials. He had a keen interest in nature study since his boyhood and became very much fascinated with the study of coastal wetlands, fauna, flora and ecology of Sundarbans which finally helped him

✉ Samiran Chakrabarti
chakrabarti32@gmail.com

Ashim Kumar Nath
nathasim@yahoo.com

¹ Department of Zoology, University of Kalyani, 32/B, Green Park, Belghoria, Kolkata 700056, India

² Department of Zoology, Sidhu Kanho Birsha University, Ranchi Road, Purulia, West Bengal 723104, India

to establish a marine research station, Susama Devi Choudhurani Marine Biological Research Institute (SDMBRI) in memory of his mother in 1965, as a private research laboratory with the supports and inspirations from his close associates. Prof. Choudhury then joined the Department of Zoology, University of Calcutta. Here, along with his other research activities, his passion continued to study the different ecological and biological aspects of Sundarbans delta. For his knowledge and dedication in the study of the estuarine and marine biota, he was successful to convince the University of Calcutta to establish the Department of Marine Science where he joined as a pioneer founder faculty and remained there till his formal retirement.

Prof. Choudhury was curious about the processes affecting distribution and abundance of species as well as the factors responsible keeping the biodiversity high. He was one of the finest teachers, brilliant in his lecture, always unruffled, measured voice and unbridled affection towards his students. He was a rare teacher who could discuss and discourse on any topic of zoology at any time and not only with his research students but also with very young and curious undergraduate students who are completely novice to zoology. He was the founder of marine science related academic discourse and research in eastern India. His work in Gangetic delta, especially Sundarbans ecology, stood out for its uniqueness in helping the people of the soil in that area. Till death, he was eager to visit the field. He bridged the gaps between population ecology, macroecology and genetics. He regularly supervised students in all these fields. He excelled in building consensus, a key step towards evidence-based policy. He was actively engaged in the reclamation of mangroves in parts of Sundarbans. As a naturalist, he worked on biology and behaviour of *Saccoglossus*, echiurids, sipunculids, nemertines, *Lingula* etc. in different islands of Sundarbans. He was involved in the inventory of species threatened with extinction. Sundarbans have been declared as “World Heritage Site” in 1989 and as a “Biosphere Reserve” in 2001. His contribution behind these declarations is ever memorable. With profound knowledge on different aspects, he successfully completed several research projects and collaborated with various national and international research organizations to open a new horizon in the sphere of Marine Science. He has published more than 350

research papers and supervised about 67 students for their Ph. D. degrees. He was UN/ESCAP Consultant that prepared the document on “Mangrove Ecosystem Network for South East Asia”.

Prof. Choudhury was a Fellow of The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, London and The National Academy of Sciences, India. He was conferred ‘Doctor of Science (*Honoris Causa*)’ by the West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Sciences in 2015. He was recipient of awards like: ‘MEEN MITRA’ (2011) by the Govt of West Bengal, Lifetime Achievement Award’ by the Zoological Society, Kolkata (2014) and also by the West Bengal Biodiversity Board, Govt. of West Bengal (2016) and many other appreciations and prizes from several Organizations and Committees associated with environment and ecology. He has served as QRT Expert for different Institutes in India. He has acted as an Expert Member/Advisor in many State and Central Government Policy bodies like: National Mangrove Committee (1976–1983), Island Development Committee of the Planning Commission (1988–1999), Scientific Committee for Ocean Research (SCOR) (1990–1992), National Committee for Coastal Beach Development (MoEFCC), National Mangrove Committee (since 1976) under the Government of India. He served as a Member, Sundarban Development Board and Sundarban Mangrove and Biosphere Reserve, Chairperson, Mangrove Plantation Monitoring Committee and NBSAP for Coastal Zone Development of West Bengal, Honorary Warden, Wild Life Advisory Board, and many others under Govt. of West Bengal. He has visited many countries having mangrove vegetation as an expert member of the UNESCO and also other countries for attending meetings as UNESCO delegate. Being a Scientist of such national and international fame, he never hesitated to remain associated with many local and village committees/clubs as an advisor.

The death of Prof Choudhury leaves a void not only in the heart of his students and family members but also the ‘World of Science’ has lost a dedicated environmentalist at this moment when the Sundarbans are facing multiple problems for its sustainability.

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.