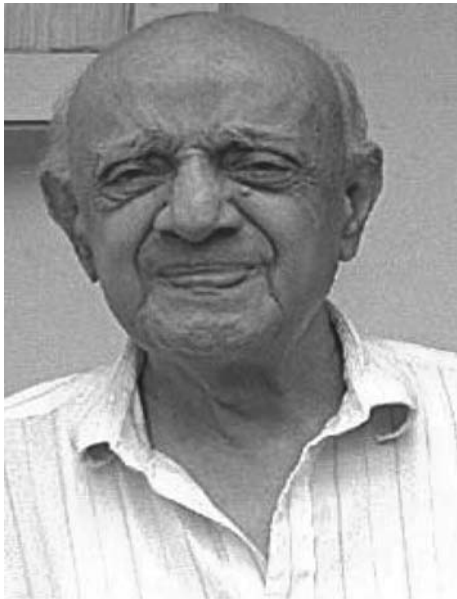


Obituary

Dr. Mysore Anantaswamy Rau (15th August 1916 – 6th June 2012)



The botanical fraternity in India was deeply shocked to learn about the sad demise of the eldest botanist in India, Dr. M. Ananthaswamy Rau, on Wednesday, the 6th of June 2012. Dr. Rau was born on 15th August 1916 (a landmark date in India's history, but not so when he was born). He obtained his B. Sc. (Hons) degree in 1936 and M. Sc. (Botany) degree in 1938, both in first class from Mysore University. He taught botany at Mysore and Bangalore and was encouraged by Drs. M.A. Sampath Kumaran and C.V. Krishna Iyengar to take up research. He received much guidance from the world known Prof. Panchanan Maheshwari on embryological studies in the Leguminosae. He received his doctoral degree in January 1953. His students include the likes of Prof. H.Y. Mohan Ram, an eminent botanist of recent times. He went to United States of America as Mary S Muellhaupt Post Doctoral Scholar to work at Ohio State University at Columbus from 1953 to 1954. Thereafter, he began his professional career as a Systematic Botanist at Northern Circle of the newly reorganized Botanical Survey of India (BSI) at Dehra Dun in 1956. In fact, he established this regional centre and initiated the

development of a new herbarium, which has now grown to serve as the prime centre for taxonomic research in northern India. Dr. Rau was an expert embryologist by training and a systematic botanist by profession.

Dr. Rau conducted extensive botanical surveys in the states of Uttar Pradesh (including the present state of Uttarakand), Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, all of which fall within in the botanical jurisdiction of BSI (Northern Circle), now known as the BSI Northern Regional Centre. His botanical collections were made from the Gangetic plains of Uttar Pradesh to the cold deserts of Lahul-Spiti, Leh and Laddak as well as the higher altitudes of Kashmir and Kumaon. Based on his collections, some new species were described both by himself (viz., *Alectra parasitica* var. *chitrakutensis*, *Clematis heynei*) as well as by others (viz., *Berchemia jainiana*, *Pegaeophyton garhwalensis*, *Elaeagnus kanaii* var. *osmastonii*, *Swertia alpina*). His interest in Himalayan plants led to the publication of two important books, namely, *Illustrations of Western Himalayan Flowering Plants* (1963) and *High Altitude Flowering Plants* (1975). He also had to his credit over 24 research papers.

He retired in 1974 as Deputy Director from the very same Centre he established and nurtured. After his retirement he moved to his hometown, Mysore, where he was appointed UGC Professor at Manasa Gangotri, the postgraduate centre for teaching and research of Mysore University. At the university, he not only taught systematic botany but also guided a Ph.D. student – Dr. Mallikarjunappa, who worked on the Flora of Kushalnagara, Madikeri District – and completed taxonomic works on Paeoniaceae, Coriariaceae and Ranunculaceae for the Flora of India project of BSI. His work on the revision of Coriariaceae and Paeoniaceae was subsequently published by Botanical Survey of India in the form of Flora of India Fascicle (1978) and his taxonomic treatise on the family Ranunculaceae was published in the first volume of Flora of India (1993). He was also responsible for establishing the first Tissue Culture Laboratory in India at Bangalore in 1954. He delivered many

lectures, mostly on Himalayan plants, in India and abroad. He also had a great passion for cricket and was elected member of the First All India Panel of Cricket Umpires of BCCI; he also umpired many Ranji Trophy matches between 1946 and 1956. Dr. Rau was also elected as the first secretary of the Mysore Gymkhana.

In recognition of his botanical contributions he was awarded the Panchanan Maheshwari Medal in 1986 by the Indian Botanical Society. He was appointed Member of the Advisory Committee for the Centre of Advanced Study in Botany: Plant Morphology and Embryology at University of Delhi. In his honour an entire block (comprising the Library, Herbarium, Scientists rooms, etc.) in the building of BSI (Northern Circle), Dehra Dun, was named after Dr Rau by the then Head, Dr. D.K. Singh; this was indeed a touching gesture

from the Centre that he helped set up. In recognition of his taxonomic work some new species were named after him (viz., *Dicliptera raii*, *Hieracium raii*, *Vernonia raii*, *Bulbophyllum raii*, *Ischaemum raii*, *Anemone raii*).

Dr. Rau was a wonderful human being, who endeared himself to all. He was one of the most respected officers in the Botanical Survey of India. He was aptly described as a "botanist among gentlemen and gentleman among botanists" by his own student Prof. H.Y. Mohan Ram. He is survived by two sons and a daughter.

M. Sanjappa, Bengaluru
&
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