

Prof. V.L. Chopra – A Tribute by CSIR-IHBT



9 August 1936-18 April 2020

With heavy heart, the CSIR-IHBT family pays tribute to Professor Virender Lal Chopra who had been a fatherly figure and source of inspiration for the research fraternity.

Born on 9 August 1936 at Adhwal (now in Pakistan), Prof. V.L. Chopra did his schooling in Delhi, graduation from Central College of Agriculture, Delhi University, Associateship from Indian Agricultural Research Institute and Ph.D. from Institute of Genetics, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh (UK) in Genetics. He worked in several capacities at IARI and served in the prestigious position of Director General, Indian Council of Agriculture Research. Thereafter, he served as BP Pal National Professor of Plant Biotechnology, Member of the Planning Commission of India, Chancellor of the Central Agricultural University of Imphal and Chancellor of Central University of Kerala.

He had been elected fellow of several academies viz., Indian Academy of Sciences, Indian National Science Academy, National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, National Academy of Sciences, India, European Academy of Sciences and Arts and The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS). Various prestigious national and international awards and honours conferred on Prof. Chopra include Padma Bhushan, Borlaug Award, FICCI Award, Honor Summus Medal of the Watumull Foundation (USA), O.P. Bhasin Award, FAO/IAAS World Food Day Award, ISCA Birbal Sahni Birth Centenary Award, INSA Silver Jubilee Commemoration Medal, INSA Aryabhat Medal etc. He had served Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) in various capacities also successfully accomplished several international assignments of FAO and IFAD.

CSIR-IHBT had a long and fruitful association with Prof. V.L. Chopra which is difficult to express in words. As Chairman of Research Council for two consecutive terms (1998-2002), Prof. Chopra played a key role in shaping the research landscape of the Institute. Being a visionary, he was instrumental in framing the R&D mandate of the Institute and making it a centre of multidisciplinary research. As a Chairman of many of the Selection Committees, he immensely contributed towards development of this institute. He keenly interacted with scientists on a one-to-one basis, and mentored them to take up scientific challenges to benefit the society, industry and academia.

Himalayan Biodiversity was a subject close to his heart. He encouraged researchers towards documenting and mapping the rich biodiversity of Himalaya and motivated them to spend time in the field with the local communities so as to learn from their wisdom. He also exhorted researchers to actively participate and contribute towards climate change research.

At the same time, Prof. V.L. Chopra emphasized on bioprospecting Himalayan resources so that the Institute could carve a niche for itself and cater to the needs of the country.

Popularization of science was key to him. His enlightening talks on National Science Day, National Technology Day, Foundation Day of CSIR and IHBT immensely benefitted the students, academicians and general public.

He authored many books with the scientists of the Institute. The books viz., Technologies for Livelihood Enhancement, Climate Change and its Ecological Implications for the Western Himalaya, Ornamental Plants for Gardening and Medicinal & Nutraceutical Plants from The Himalayas have been appreciated by the readers.

Prof. V.L. Chopra was a great visionary and motivator for CSIR-IHBT. His sudden demise on 18 April 2020 has left a big void in Indian Science. The institute will always cherish its association with Prof. V.L. Chopra and remain indebted to him.