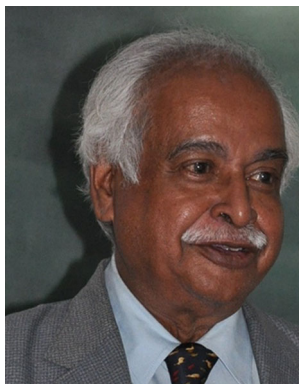


## Obituary: Dr. Asish Kumar Ghosh (1938–2018)

Samiran Chakrabarti<sup>1</sup>

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Dr. Asish Kumar Ghosh (b. 1938) former Director, Zoological Survey of India and founder Director, Centre for Environment and Development (ENDEV), Kolkata passed away in Kolkata on April 1, 2018 at the age of 81. A prolific reader and an orator, *par excellence*, he became silent for a brief period and was battling with throat cancer.

A bachelor, Dr. Ghosh had his early education in Rourkella, Odisha, and later had his graduation (1957), Masters (1959) and Ph. D. (1964) in Zoology from the University of Calcutta. After teaching in an undergraduate college in Kolkata for a brief period, he moved to the Department of Plant Pathology and Entomology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA as a ‘Fulbright Scholar and Rockefeller Foundation Grantee’ where he continued his research on ‘Long range dispersal of aphid-vectors of

plant viruses’. After returning to India, Dr. Ghosh again joined the University of Calcutta as a Research Officer in a PL 480 Project and continued his researches extensively on the taxonomy of aphids (insects).

On joining the Zoological Survey of India in 1972, besides taxonomic works, he became more interested in environmental and biodiversity related works and biodiversity conservation. The first Environmental Monitoring Wing in ZSI (Kolkata and Chennai) was started under Dr. Ghosh’s leadership in early 1980’s. Between 1992 and 1996, he led delegations to the Ramsar Convention in Japan and acted as a Member of Indian delegation to the Asian Wetland Conference to Malaysia, Indo- Russia Forest Meet to Russia, IUCN General Assembly to Argentina and also other International meet in Kenya, China, France, Mexico and Spain. He also served as a Member of the Biodiversity Authority of India and took active and important role in formulating Indian Biodiversity Act-2002 and its Rules in 2004. An outspoken Environmental Activist, Dr. Ghosh had the courage to submit an affidavit supporting the public in wetland case while still he was in office.

Under the leadership of Dr. Ghosh, ENDEV was actively engaged in biodiversity exploration and documentation, exploring old and indigenous varieties of crops, fruits etc. at block level. The first People’s Biodiversity Register (PBR) in West Bengal on the biodiversity of Kolkata was prepared through his leadership. After the Sundarban was devastated by cyclone Aila in 2009, Dr. Ghosh worked on the field with the affected people and launched several projects. Out of these, the revival of long-forgotten traditional paddy seeds that grow in brackish water, became a life saver. This endeavor won the World Bank honour for best innovation among more than 100 contestant countries.

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Dr. Ghosh had written extensively on biodiversity conservation, natural resource management, on different dimensions of environment and development along with his basic interest on aphids taxonomy. He has more than 400 research papers in his credit besides about 10 books and monographs. He also authored 7 volumes of 'Fauna Volumes' on Indian Aphids published by the Zoological Survey of India. He won several prestigious honours and

prizes and became the President of the Aphidological Society of India.

Dr. Ghosh was also Visiting Faculty Member of several premier institutions. He also supervised a dozen of Ph. D. students. He had also keen interest in literature, film and other social activities. His death caused profound grief among a large number of students, academics, environmental scientists and scholars in India and abroad.