

## OBITUARY

The cruel hands of death snatched away Dr. Ashok Kumar Khanna from us, on 27th August 1984. The untimely demise of Dr. Khanna shocked and shattered every one of us who knew him professionally or otherwise. On that unfortunate day, a party of four persons from Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehra Dun was proceeding to Spiti Valley on field-work and the accident took place at Trande Dhank, about 4.5 km before Sungra, on Simla Rampur-Wangtu road, at 3 : 30 p. m. when the jeep with trailer, while saving some sheep, plunged down a 500' gorge. All the four occupants passed away in that accident—and Ashok was one of them.



Ashok K. Khanna

Born on 6th August, 1951 at Kashipur, District Nainital, U. P., Dr. Ashok Kumar Khanna showed his brilliancy in the studies right from the school stage. He secured many honours and awards during his early college days in classes as well as outside in extra-curricular activities. And with that bright back-ground he passed his M. Sc. in Geology from Lucknow University in the year 1972. Soon after, he joined the Department of Oil Palynology at the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow and worked for his Ph. D. degree. During those days, one could see the soft-spoken, apparently shy but well-mannered, polished and intelligent person in Dr. Khanna engrossed in his research. He used to work day-in and day-out on the palynologically difficult samples of Subathu and ultimately he succeeded in extracting rich miofloras from these apparently unyielding rocks. Thus, in 1978, he was awarded the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Lucknow University on his thesis entitled "Stratigraphy and Palynology of the Subathu Formation of the Punjab Basin, India".

Thereafter, in October 1977, he joined the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehra Dun as a Senior Research Assistant and subsequently, in June 1978 he was appointed as Scientist B at the same Institute. He extended his work on the biostratigraphy of the Himachal Pradesh—westward to Jammu and eastward to Sataun. After reaching to the Wadia Institute it appeared as if Dr. Khanna's scientific personality got unfolded and his real talent of management, organisation, cooperation and scientific perseverance brightened up. His helping attitude to everyone was evident from his untiring efforts to solve any problem one posed to him.

The Himalayas fascinated him while he was sitting in their lap at Dehra Dun, and driven by the instinct for research he extended his field of activity to the Phanerozoic Tethyan sediments of the Spiti Valley. Dr. Khanna had collected a large number of precious samples from several measured sections covering Cambrian to Triassic sequence in Himalayas. After many hazardous trips to the field and years of

patient laboratory processing he produced a wealth of microfossils, chitinozoa, scolecodonts, acritarcha, etc. from the Lower Palaeozoics of Spiti. His research on the biostratigraphy of the Pin Dolomite of the Tethys Himalayas was a break-through contribution which marked the beginning of the task of building up of a palynological reference-section for biostratigraphic correlation in the Himalaya. His continuous, untiring efforts could get him excellent results when he discovered, for the first time from India, the Carboniferous mioflora from the Po Formation, Spiti Valley, and it seems that his intense love for these rocks drove him there on his last journey too. In his meteoric career, he contributed a number of important papers on palynostratigraphy. His work on Subathu is outstanding where he delimited the palynozones and reconstructed the depositional history of the basin.

Dr. A. K. Khanna had a pleasing personality, amicable nature and humanitarian thinking. He leaves behind wife and two little daughters. The void created by passing away of Dr. Ashok Kumar Khanna in the world of Palynology is not easy to be filled, and to all those who knew him it is an irreparable personal loss.

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