

Our Founders



Dr. A.N. Lahiri
(1935-2008)

Dr. Ashok Nath Lahiri was born on 1st May 1935 at Kolkata. He had early school and university education at Kolkata. He did M.Sc. in Botany from the Presidency College, Kolkata. His M.Sc. thesis under Prof. S.M. Sircar was on rice embryo culture under aseptic culture. Findings were published in *Nature*. He did his Ph.D. on auxins and geotropism on faba bean at Bedford College, University of London, under the supervision of Prof. L.J. Audus, F.L.S. His pioneering research papers on geotropism and auxins were published in series in the *Journal of Experimental Botany*. On return to India, for a short time, he worked as Pool Officer in the Bose Institute, Kolkata, before joining as Plant Physiologist in the Division of Basic Resource Survey at ICAR-Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, on 1st Oct 1960, the day Institute was celebrating its first anniversary. Later in 1975 he became the first Head of the newly established Division of Soil Water Plant Relationships, a position he occupied till his superannuation. He was an outstanding mentor, guide and team leader, having ability to motivate team members to excel in their respective field of specialization.

At ICAR-CAZRI, Jodhpur, he established laboratory of Plant Physiology and worked on the germination behavior of desert grasses and water relations of trees. He identified water soluble inhibitors in grass seeds that do not permit seeds to germinate till sufficient rains have leached out the inhibitors and soil moisture is buildup to sustain emerged seedlings. He also quantified the consumptive water use of range grasses and trees like *Prosopis cineraria* and *Tecomella undulata*. Due to scarcity of vegetation and high livestock population the desert range grasses experience grazing stress. He worked on the effect of different intensities of defoliations on desertic range grasses like

Lasiurus and *Cenchrus*. Tree saplings planted in fields need watering till their roots penetrate deep enough to tap moisture from the lower depths of soil. He quantified the threshold minimum irrigation water requirement for establishment of out-planted neem saplings.

During surveys of the desert, he collected pearl millet land races from different rainfall zones and worked on their water relations and identified sensitive growth stages most susceptible to drought. His work showed that plants grown under improved soil fertility conditions could overcome the adverse effects of intermittent droughts. Dr. Lahiri quantified the consumptive use of water of dry land crops like pearl millet, mung bean, moth bean and cluster bean. Extensive studies were undertaken on drought effects on nitrogen fractions of crops and on enzymes of nitrogen and phosphorus metabolism. Ground water in the region is mostly saline and farmers often use ground water as a life-saving irrigation. He studied the physiological effects of saline water irrigation in these crops. His studies established the beneficial effects of soil fertility on crops during water and salt stress. Collaborating with agronomist he successfully utilized hospital waste and discarded drip plastic bottles to economically use water in widely spaced crops.

Dr. Lahiri co-ordinated inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional Indo-US project on germplasm enhancement for drought tolerance with centers at Jodhpur, Hyderabad, Solapur and Bijapur. He visited Australia and the US on study tours. He superannuated in 1995 and settled in Jodhpur. He was well read person with ability to discuss wide range of issues. He was a lively, likable, very helpful and an extraordinary communicator. He breathed his last on 11-01-2008 after a brief illness. He was survived by his wife and two daughters.

