

Thoughts and Feelings in Commemoration of Dr. S.K. Jain

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It was a great privilege to meet Dr. S.K. Jain in December, 1988 in Kunming, China, during his visit to the Ethnobotany Department of Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences. The department at the time was in the initial stages of its establishment. Dr. Jain's excellent lecture on '*Ethnobotany in India*', delivered at the institute, stimulated us in China to move ahead with the development of ethnobotany as a scientific research subject. Dr. Jain himself had benefitted from wide experience in many fields of botany, including taxonomy, botanical explorations, botanic gardens, protected area management and ex-situ conservation. Dedicating his working life to the service of botany and the people, he became especially well known for his work on indigenous knowledge and sustainable development. He was an early advocate of cross-disciplinary sciences, seeking linkages between botany and the social sciences, and encouraged others to do the same. In the laboratory, he sought links between indigenous knowledge of useful plants and phytochemistry. Jain's work in India led to the subject of ethnobotany becoming accepted as a respectable academic discipline by the Indian scientific community. He was known as the Father of Indian Ethnobotany.

In October of 1990, I started nine-years' service with the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) based in Kathmandu, Nepal. My job, as head of the Division of Mountain Natural Resources (MNR), was to work on the management of natural resources in the mountain areas, in particular to train students and professional staff from across the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region in ethnobotany. This international position gave me increased opportunities to interact and collaborate with Dr. Jain and his colleagues in India. Invited by Dr. Jain to attend the IV International Congress of Ethnobiology (ICE) held at the CSIR- National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) at Lucknow in 1994, I had the further opportunity to meet several scientists of international repute, among them Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, Dr. Brent Berlin, Dr. Darrell Posey and Dr. Richard Ford. I felt deeply honored to be presented with the prestigious 1993 Harshberger Medal at the congress by Dr. Jain, acting on behalf of the Society of Ethnobotanists. I took this to be in

recognition of the advances in ethnobotany that had been made in China, rather than about myself personally.



While at ICIMOD, I remained in frequent contact with Dr. Jain and other Indian colleagues, helping them to organize training courses and conduct community field conservation projects in various parts of India. Among the many ex-students and colleagues of Dr. Jain with whom I had the pleasure of collaboration were Dr. Arvind Saklani and Dr. R.R. Rao. Nearly two decades of personal connection and collaboration with Dr. Jain have given me deep admiration



for his character and approach to his work. He and I (I feel) have been soul-brothers in our professional lives.

Dr. S.K. Jain was a courageous man, always ready to face fresh challenges and encouraging others to do the same. He promoted international exchanges and international collaborations as well. Two international programs that have benefitted from Dr. Jain's vision were the *People and Plants Initiative* (PPI) of WWF, UNESCO and the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, and the *Medicinal Plants Conservation Initiative* (MPCI) of Plantlife International. During my own engagement in these programs, I have been able to work and exchange ideas with the international ethnobotanists like: Dr. Tony Cunningham, Dr. Gary Martin, Dr. Yildiz Aumeeruddy and Dr. Alan Hamilton. Both of these programs were concerned with the practical application of ethnobotany to issues of sustainable development and conservation, and involved field case studies and exchanges of experience between countries. A

training course run by the *Foundation for the Rehabilitation of Local Health Traditions* (FRLHT) at Bangalore, under the auspices of MPCI, led to a follow-on workshop between China, India and UK in Kunming in 2008, which proved to be of benefit to all three parties.

Biodiversity and natural ecosystems are under great pressure and threat today from environmental change, including the global warming. The solutions to these problems will, of necessity, have to engage indigenous and the tribal people and communities, given that unique, targeted, solutions are needed for every place on Earth and indigenous people hold irreplaceable treasure-troves of local knowledge about the environments of their area. Thanks to Dr Jain, ethnobotanists in China and India are now rising to the challenge. We in China are indebted to Dr. S.K. Jain. His learning and wisdom live on in his many publications, lasting contributions to science from a well-lived life.