



J C Bhattacharyya (1930 – 2012)

Prof J C Bhattacharyya had a long association with the Bangalore Association for Science Education as he served on the Governing Council. He provided valuable guidance for the popularisation and educational activities of the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium. He was a very good teacher and scientist. He suggested many outreach activities with a view to provide good exposure to positional astronomy and use of telescope to the general public and students.

JCB had his initial education in Kolkata; his specialisation was radio physics, as the subject electronics was called those days. He had specialised in instrumentation. When he entered Kodaikanal Observatory through the India Meteorological Department he found ample scope for building instruments for astronomical applications. He developed a keen interest in astronomy and built a Magnetograph for the solar observations. The instrument was in use for decades. As the Observatory evolved into the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, he was involved in the design of instruments exclusively for astronomical observations. With photomultipliers as the sole detectors for measuring the starlight and slow recording devices like chart recorders and valve circuit based amplifiers he came up with novel ideas for recording variations in star light. The technique of occultations fascinated him. He successfully recorded the occultation by Ganymede and later the occultation by Uranus. Both yielded new results - detection of atmosphere in Ganymede and the discovery of rings of Uranus. Subsequently with the revolutions in electronics the instrument evolved from chart recorders to cassette recorders to digital recording. Millisecond accuracy was achieved and successfully used for recording lunar occultations of stars.

JCB utilised the cloudy evenings in Kavalur to teach astronomy. The youngsters, mostly new recruits, would eagerly wait to listen to him on various topics like the designs of the telescopes, their functional differences, the instruments like photometers, spectroscopes and the results they provide. These informal interactions reflected his ability to communicate and teach. He was very well known for his popular articles in Bengali and English. He would describe to youngsters the technique of conveying difficult concepts of astronomy to lay persons with simple examples. He encouraged people to write in their mother tongue and popularise astronomy.

Soft spoken JCB had a very good sense of humour. The four hour long drive to Kavalur in the 80's were made quite interesting with his narration of anecdotes and stories all along the way.

JCB's leadership as the Director of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, after the sudden demise of Prof M K VainuBappu is well known. We at the Planetarium had the fortune of his guidance, when he was the Acting Director, though for a brief period.

We miss him very badly. We pray for the departed soul.