

OBITUARY

K D ABHYANKAR (1928-2007)*

Professor K D Abhyankar, Indian astrophysist, teacher and well known populariser of astronomy, passed away in Hyderabad (AP) on 8 November 2007 at the age of 79. He was born on 21st June, 1928 and showed signs of brilliance from his childhood. He procured gold medals at high school and colleges. After completion of his M.Sc. from Agra University, he worked for a short period at Holkar College, Indore. He obtained a Government of India senior research fellowship and worked at Kodaikanal Observatory during 1952-1954. He was awarded a scholarship for doctoral studies at the University of California at Berkeley. He worked for his Ph.D. thesis, under the supervision of Otto Struve, and studied several close binary stars with a view to understanding stellar evolution. He discovered a short period variable AD CMi. The work done by him for his Ph. D thesis was a masterpiece and has been well quoted.

On his return from US he worked for a short while at Kodaikanal Observatory before joining Osmania University. Prof K D Abhyankar was solely responsible for introducing Astronomy at the graduate and post graduate levels. He is singularly responsible for establishing the Astronomical Society of India (ASI) -this organization is playing a very important role, to this day, in bringing together professional astronomers of the country to share ideas and coordinate programs in astronomy & astrophysics. He has served ASI in several capacities including its Presidentship.



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In 1963 Prof K D Abhyankar worked for a year at David Dunlap Observatory, Canada on NRC post-doctoral fellowship and in 1967 as a senior post-doctoral resident research associateship of NRC-NASA of USA at Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, where he worked in collaboration with A.L. Fymat on problems of radiative transfer.

* Based on ASI Website – **Editor**

Prof Abhyankar has played a critical role in establishing the Japal Rangapur Observatory (JRO). He served as the Director of JRO and as a Head of the Department of Astronomy, during 1961-63 (incharge), 1973-81, 1986-88, till he retired in 1988. He also served the faculty of science of Osmania University in the capacity of Dean during 1977-80.

He has been elected Fellow of Royal Astronomical Society, Indian Academy of Science, Indian National Science Academy, Member of Sigma Xi of USA, Member of Astronomical Society of the Pacific, American Astronomical Society, International Astronomical Union. Prof Abhyankar has been the Chairman of the Advisory committee of the Positional Astronomy Centre, Calcutta. He is the founder member of ASI, Andhra Pradesh Academy of Sciences and Maharashtra Academy of Sciences.

He was the recipient of several honours including the best teachers award by the Andhra Pradesh Government, NSSA award for Patent Rights on a new technique of measuring optical polarization, INSA Vainu Bappu Award and M.P.Birla Award.

He has written two books and more than 150 research papers in reputed scientific journals. His scientific work may be divided into three main categories: (i) Solar Physics (ii) Binary & Variable stars and (iii) Radiative Transfer & Planetary Atmospheres. Prof. Abhyankar also had deep interest in History of Ancient Indian Astronomy and contributed a dozen of articles (vide below).

Prof. K D Abhyankar was passionately devoted to astronomy. He worked throughout his life with the zeal of a missionary to teach and spread Astronomy. He was amongst the few people who are good at both observations and theoretical astronomy. He was not only a successful teacher but also a great research enthusiast.

Select publications of Prof. K D Abhyankar in History of Indian Astronomy

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