

# 「We Hear From」



Dr. Asima Chatterjee  
(1917-2006)

Rabindranath Chattopadhyay

## Dr. Asima Chattopadhyay's Short Biographical Sketch

Thakurdas Mukhopadhyay's son was "Haran Mukhopadhyay." Haran Mukhopadhyay had two sons named Nanigopal Mukhopadhyay and Indranarayan Mukhopadhyay. Nanigopal was a professor in the department of English of Bangabasi College, Calcutta. Nanigopal's only son Amiya Bhusan Mukhopadhyay was a Doctor. Indranarayan, who himself was a Doctor had a son named Sarasi Ranjan Mukhopadhyay and a daughter named Asima Mukhopadhyay. Sarasi Ranjan became a Doctor and served as vice-principal of R.G. Kar Medical College, Calcutta. Asima Mukhopadhyay studied Chemistry and became the then first ever woman in Asia to obtain D.Sc. degree. She was married to Professor Barada Ranjan Chattopadhyay of Shibpur Engineering College and then onward was well-known as Prof. Asima Chattopadhyay.

Asima Mukhopadhyay (later 'Chattopadhyay') was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 1917. Although it is not known for certain whether her birthplace is her original ancestral house in Gopinathpur (At present Paschim Gopinathpur), P.S.-Haripal, (Near Tarakeswar), Dist.-Hooghly, of West Bengal, India (PIN No.-712403) where she spent her childhood. That very ancestral house still exists in this village with almost a fallen-down structure. After schooling in Bethune Collegiate School, Calcutta and then completing her graduation from Bethune college successively she completed her M.Sc. degree in Chemistry from

University of Calcutta in 1938. In 1940 she was appointed the Head of the Department of Chemistry in Lady Brabourne College, Calcutta. Performing an extensive research-work under the external guidance of Prof. P.K. Bose she obtained Doctor of Science degree from the University of Calcutta in 1944. That year she was appointed as honorary professor in the department of chemistry of Calcutta University. In 1947 Prof. Asima Chattopadhyay went to USA for a post-Doctoral research where she made her research on the 'naturally occurring glycosides' under the guidance of Prof. L.M. Parks of Wisconsin University. Next two years (1948-1949) she worked with Prof. L. Zechmeister in California Institute of Technology on 'Carotinoids and provitamins'. Following this she continued her post-Doctoral research working extensively on 'organically active alkaloids under the illuminating guidance of Nobel Laureate Prof. Paul Karrer in University of Zurich, Switzerland. After 1950 she returned to India. She afterwards continued profoundly in-depth research on Indian Medical herbs, their chemical and biochemical properties and applications. Significantly her contributions on Alkaloids and kumarin, Tarpinoids, Analytic Chemistry and kinematics of Organic Compounds are specially acknowledged. Herbal antidotes for nervous weakness /fatigue and hysteria, known by brand name Ayush-56, extracted from herb Marcella Minuta and a herbal antidote for Malaria from herbs

'Alstonia Scholaris', 'Swertia Chirata', 'Picrochiza Kurroa' and 'Ceasalpinna Crista' are notable among her many such discoveries.

She had published to her credit more than 400 research papers in various National and International journals. Contoured in six volume and published from University of Calcutta is the series 'Indian Herbal Medicine' which Prof. Chattopadhyay as the chief-editor of. Besides this she was also the chief-editor of 'Indian Medicinal Plant' published by Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Govt. of India. In 1954 Prof. Asima Chattopadhyay entered in the department of Pure-Chemistry, University of Calcutta as Reader. In 1962 she was honoured there with the chair of Khaira-Professor. She played the key role in transforming the UGC-sponsored 'Special Assistance Programme' into the 'Centre of Advanced Studies in Natural Products' in 1985. She founded research institutions like 'Regional Research Institute', Calcutta and 'Ayurvedic Hospital for Clinical Trials'. Various prestigious National Awards which Prof. Chattopadhyay was awarded with are in the following list;

Year	Award
1960	Member of Indian National Science Academy
1961	Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award
1975	Padma Bhusan
1982	C.V.Raman Award (UGC)
1989	Sir Asutosh Mukhopadhyay Gold-Medal by Indian Science Congress
1992	Goayal Award by Kurukshetra University
1995	Silver-jubilee Award by Central Council of Ayurveda and Siddha
1996	Best Teacher Award by University of Calcutta

A completely new chapter in her life opened in 1982 when she was nominated and elected as a member of Rajyasabha and remained with that status until 1990. Awakened by the impulse Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva religious-minded Prof. Asima Chattopadhyay was greatly influenced by the ideology of Swami Vivekananda. She learned vocal music from her childhood over a period of fourteen years and consequently gained a special aptitude in Indian Classical Vocal Music.

In 1967 she lost her husband and she left this mundane world for her heavenly abode on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2006.

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