

ANIL KUMAR DAS

On 1961 February 18 Anil Kumar Das passed away at Hyderabad after a brief illness. He had retired the previous year from service under the Government of India and as the newly appointed Director of the Nizamiah Observatory at Hyderabad had undertaken the task of organizing the new department of astronomy in the Osmania University. His death will leave a gap in Indian observational effort in astronomy that will take many a year to fill.

Das was born in 1902 in the former Province of Bengal. After obtaining his Master of Science degree in Physics at the Calcutta University, Das joined the team of workers under Professor Fabry at the Sorbonne.

A study of the absorption spectra of halogens formed his thesis for the doctor's degree which he obtained some time later. Some months of post-doctoral studies at Göttingen and a brief period at the Solar Physics Observatory in Cambridge on a subsequent visit to the United Kingdom constituted further training opportunities abroad that Das had.

Das joined the Indian Meteorological Department in 1930. His early work in the Department pertained to weather forecasting and some other aspects of meteorology. In 1937 he joined Kodaikanal Observatory as Assistant Director and, except for a brief period during the war years, he remained at Kodaikanal until his retirement. He was appointed Director of the Kodaikanal Observatory in 1946 and continued as head of that institution until 1960. His period of directorship was characterized by considerable development in instrumental facilities and much expansion in different fields of endeavour in astrophysics.

Almost all of the astronomical contributions of Das pertain to the field of solar physics. Many of his papers which seek explanations of various solar phenomena reveal the sound nature of the training he received in classical physics in his early academic career. Primarily an experimentalist, Das carried out several spectrophotometric studies of sunspots and the photosphere. His investigations also include studies of the motion of gases in the chromosphere and the association of solar noise bursts with optically observed solar phenomena. But Das will be remembered in India mostly for his efforts to provide the young researcher with all instrumental facilities for astronomical research. At Kodaikanal, the new solar tower telescope and high-dispersion spectrograph, the coronagraph and H-alpha heliograph, the ionospheric laboratory and the magnetic observatory all bear eloquent testimony to his vision, zeal and organizing ability.

In recognition of his services to Indian astronomy Das was awarded "Padma Shri" in 1960. He has served on I.A.U. Commissions pertaining to Solar Physics since 1946. He was a Fellow of the National Institute of Sciences of India and a member of the Standing Advisory Board for Astronomy for many terms.

He was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1935.

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