

Shradhanjali to Dr. Khagendra Nath Chatterjee

GSCA Newsletter

"Death is not extinguishing the light; it's only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come." – Rabindranath Tagore

Picture of Kolkata when Khagendra was a young man

Chowringhee Street - 1947



Shradhanjali to Dr. Khagendra Nath Chatterjee

Our beloved Khagendra is no more with us. It is hard to believe and accept that he left us on January 13, 2009. His sudden death created a strong void in our organization because he was an enthusiastic and energetic cheerleader and relentlessly pushing us in achieving a better and stronger organization that he had envisioned as one of the founding members.

Khagendra, **Dr. Khagendra Nath Chatterjee**, was born on April 19, 1923 in Kolkata, India where he was also raised. Khagendra received his Medical Degree from Carmichael Medical College in 1946. After graduation, he served as a frontline physician during partitioning of India-Pakistan and later practiced medicine in India. In 1960, he came to Harvard Medical School and received further medical education and training till 1964. Some of the highlights of his long and illustrious career include visiting various medical facilities in Soviet Union in 1968, at the invitation of USSR Ministry of Health and his tenure as Chief of Surgery for Zambia in Lusaka, Zambia in the early 1970s. In 1973, he returned to the U.S. to practice medicine and became one of the first Bengali Physicians to practice in New Jersey.

Khagendra lived a long and productive life and accomplished many things besides his professional success. He played professional soccer in Kolkata, India for Mohun Bagan Club.

He was a founding member of several Bengali Cultural organizations in New Jersey, among them are Garden State Puja Association,

Infinity and Garden State Cultural Association, the latter with which he had formed a life-long love and bond in his quest to propagate Bengali Culture in the US. For his life-long dedication to promote Bengali Culture, he had been bestowed with many awards and accolades from Bengali community and organizations in the Tri State area.

Khagendra left behind a loving family and numerous friends and well wishers for he has touched the lives of many through his kindness in professional and social contacts. His legacy will survive and sustain. His professional legacy survives through his physician son, his sports legacy survives through his athletic grandsons and his love for Bengali cultural will survive through his beloved Garden State Cultural Association or GSCA.

We will dearly miss him when we enter the Puja premises and not see his imposing presence on the front desk. We will miss him when we go to cultural functions and not see him in the front row seat. We will miss Khagendra when we conduct GSCA meetings and not hear his critical comments. We will miss him when we meet at GSCA gatherings and eat Indian sweets, for he loved sweets and wished to have one in his last days at the hospital.

We know, Khagendra will be with us not in person, but in spirit he will always be amongst us.

- **Subal Sarkar on behalf of all GSCA members.**

"Khagendra will be missed but never forgotten!"



More fond memories of the late Khagenda from our senior members:

Khagenda's 80th Birthday

I always fondly remember Khagenda's 80th birthday celebration in 2003 at a popular Indian restaurant on the Oak Tree Road. We, that is, some of Khagenda's many friends in GSCA, decided to host a luncheon in Khagenda's honor. Meeta, Jeff, and their two children, Christopher and Eric were present. What a nice time we had. Khagenda beamed with delight at the presence of his grand children. Toward the end of the luncheon, I, as the Chairman of GSCA at the time, stood up to say a few words. I said the usual accolade of Khagenda's fatherly role in GSCA from before its birth as a shaky infant with uncertainty of survival to its current stable and vibrant status. I talked about his uncompromising attitude when it came to protect the interests of GSCA, that he would not hesitate to go against a popular stand which he believed could be detrimental to GSCA. I talked about his mastery of diplomatic caucus to influence any number of members of GSCA to win them over to his side. During my short speech, when I said a little entertainingly, that he was stubborn, I noticed an agreeable smile on his face accepting that adjective as a fact. Meeta quickly showed her agreement with a nod saying, "Yes, you could certainly say that".

But beneath the stubbornness, there was a soft heart and a soft voice. He was very caring when it came to health of the people around him. Anyone could approach him with a personal health related question and he would never fail to provide a positive answer. But that was not just an one time casual affair. Sometimes he would follow up, on his own, with a phone call, and would invariably talk about it the next time they met. I remember amusingly how he would seek out one of his friends, Ramen Chakraborty, now in heaven, in any party, to incessantly advise him against too much eating. Ah yes, the soft voice! Has anyone ever heard him speak in a high angry voice -not me!

Khagenda achieved much in his life: a happy family life with Ranidi, raised two children, Anjan and Meeta as brilliant scientists, a successful professional career, an invitation from Government of Russia as a consulting physician, recognition as a distinguished Bengali from CAB, a respectful influence in Indian as well as in American communities, to name a few. I am fortunate to have come in contact with such an Honorable person.

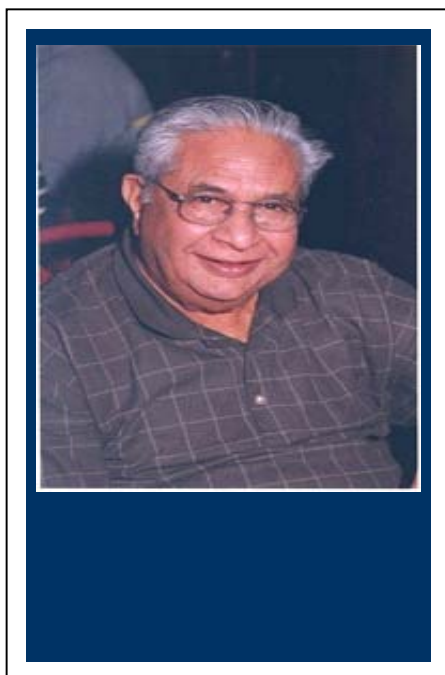
- Guru Chakravarty

In Memory of Dr. Khagendranath Chatterjee

On January 13, 2009, the Garden State Cultural Association sadly lost Dr. Khagen Chatterjee, one of its senior founding members. "Khagenda", as he was known among local Bengalis, joined the Jersey City based Garden State Puja Committee in 1981 and played a pivotal role in hosting the first Durga Puja by the association. Eventually he was elected president of GSPC. In 1992, the then executive committee and a few dedicated members including Khagenda parted ways with GSPC and formed GSCA. Khagenda was a member of GSCA until his last day. He was a father figure to many members, and was always happy to provide guidance to anyone in need. Although he is no longer with us in body, Khagenda's caring spirit will remain in our hearts. We will all miss him dearly, especially during our puja celebration. Dr. Chatterjee is survived by his wife, daughter, son and two grand sons. May his soul rest in peace!

- Asit Ray

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..... a tribute



DKC Story

The story of Dr. Khagendra Chatterjee is really a fascinating one. It's shocking to think that our 'Khagen da' (or sometimes we use to refer him as our 'Barda) is no longer living among us. For over twenty years we met him so many times, on so many occasions interacting with him in so many ways that it was like a part of our daily life.

It is hard to imagine that our 'Barda' would no longer offer a friendly advice or extend some form of help from his enormous resources. He had so many contacts unlike any other immigrants from India. In those days, we did not have much knowledge about the systems in this new Country where we came to have a 'better Life'. Time and again we confronted with so many obstacles in our day-to-day life in the new land and would seek help from Khagendra and he always would come with a solution.

Khagendra came to this country in mid 60s, much earlier than most of us. In 1970 US immigration laws made it a little easier for those who wanted to come to this country equipped with some academic achievement. For Khagendra it was even more difficult and highly competitive. But he made it. He did not take a flight aboard 'Air-India' to come to this country. Instead he boarded a passenger ship with his wife that took several days and nights over rough seas involving lot of physical discomfort, which they endured. First few years he moved from port to port to secure a stable job to support his family. He was in Boston for a brief period and went to Harvard on an assignment. Off-course he had to go through the 'Residency Training' and get his license to practice in this country. He, time to time, use to remember those days of his 'Residency Period' when he had to live on a meager stipend which was quite inadequate to run a family.

But he never gave up. Within a few years he managed to start his own practice in Wood Bridge, where he settled and raised his children. Pretty soon he bought a house in Scotch Plains, in a quite neighborhood and surrounded by hundreds of tall trees and bushes that was frequently visited by deer, raccoons and snakes. His house was very close to a small Zoo, run by Exxon Oil Company, where tigers were also seen. Somehow he liked the proximity of animal habitats, which apparently did not harm his family life. But for us it was scary to visit Khagendra's house even in the daytime and far worse in the nighttime.

In his neighborhood Khagendra soon became very popular particularly among Indian Immigrants. He loved to meet people. He loved to be socially involved. He had a good practice and a comfortable income to maintain family and raise children. In this country most of the Doctors aspire to make tons of money, have million dollar Mansons and two or three expensive cars. They do not have much time for the social life. Khagendra was different. He loved to get involved in all aspects of our social life. He loved association and spent a lot of time and effort to have an organization of Bengali immigrants. That's where I met him about twenty years ago.

A few of us from Edison, Jersey City and Wood-bridge area attended a meeting some twenty years ago where Khagendra forcefully declared the formation of GSCA, which would soon start celebrating 'Durga Puja' even though we had no money to start with. Khagendra had the confidence and encouraged all of us to find ways and means to raise money. He spent lot of energy and explored his resources, contacts and friends and raised a good sum of money which along with our efforts was just enough to start big project work like 'Durga Puja'.

Since that time we faced lot of obstacles to formulate the policy and mission for GSCA to make it a Non-Profit Organization to serve our Community the way it is now. Time and again, Khagendra was crucial to GSCA's progress for many many years.

If anybody asks me what I achieved in my life I would say I was born in a remote village in Bangladesh. I wanted to live like an average person. Not very rich, not very poor. I wanted to raise my children to have a good education so that they can have a comfortable life and don't have to face the struggles through which I had to maneuver my life. In that respect I think Khagendra made his lifetime achievement by raising one son and one daughter both of them well established in their lives. That is what we can aspire.

- Sadhan M. Guha