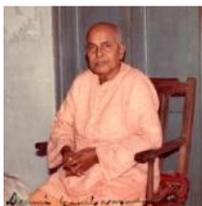


## Founding fathers of Bengal Rose Society<sup>1</sup>

### Swami Gaurishwarananda



Swami Gaurishwarananda Ji (1896 – 1986), also known as Rammoy Maharaj, was one of the founding fathers of Bengal Rose Society and its first President. He had the good fortune of receiving initiation (*Mantra Diksha*) from the ‘Holy Mother’ Sri Sarada Devi at Jayrambati in 1915. He joined the Ramakrishna Order at the Jayrambati centre and had his Sannyasa in 1928. He served in various capacities at the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. From 1952 to 1966, he was the head of Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama in Lucknow. He spent most of his remaining years in Jayrambati, where he served as President of the Matri Mandir and Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Sevashrama. He had a special knack for horticulture – of growing various kinds of fruits and flowers, especially roses. For this special ability, he was often affectionately called “*Golap Maharaj*” i.e., the Swami of rose. Among various qualities and talents that Swami Ji was endowed with, he was one of the early masters in the technique of budding for propagation of roses and spread it among many others. For his expertise in floriculture, he used to get invited by many organisations to act as a judge in their flower shows. Right from the beginning, Rammoy Maharaj was closely associated with the group that worked towards the formation of Bengal Rose Society and was unanimously chosen as its first President. Unfortunately, after putting the Society on a strong footing, Swami Gaurishwarananda could not provide his continuous guidance to it, due to his failing health. On the occasion of its Fortieth Anniversary, Bengal Rose Society, pays its humble tributes to “*Golap Maharaj*”, who also the personification of kindness, love and goodwill towards all.<sup>2</sup>



### Shibaprasad Bandyopadhyay

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled by Partha R Das Gupta based on information gathered from his personal conversations with Subhash Guhaniyogi – a founder member and Patron for life of Bengal Rose Society, and other sources as mentioned in footnotes.

<sup>2</sup> Ref. <http://ramakrishnamissionreports.blogspot.com/2012/02/obituaries-from-1976-to-2000.html>; <https://vedanta.org/2004/monthly-readings/reminiscences-of-holy-mother/>; with additional inputs from Kamal Chakraborty, a founding member of Bengal Rose Society, who had learned the technique of budding in roses from Rammoy Maharaj, during his frequent visits to Ramakrishna Mission Ashram at Katihar.

It is a tough task to describe in brief about the versatile genius of Shibaprasad Bandyopadhyay (1904 – 1995<sup>3</sup>) that even a whole book on his life and works could not achieve.<sup>4</sup> Some compared him with Luther Burbank (1849 – 1926) – a once famous American plant breeder. This was made possibly Bandyopadhyay too like Burbank, did not have any formal training in genetics (for that matter the father of the laws of heredity Gregor Johann Mendel himself had begun as a monk). Shib Babu, as he was fondly called by his numerous friends and admirers, had exceptionally keen power of observation and sharp, instinctive understanding of genetics. He carried out his experiments in vegetable and flower breeding so meticulously that even senior professors of universities held consultations with him to have a better understanding of his methods and the results. Obviously, to an inquisitive naturalist like Shib Babu, the world's most popular flower, the rose, could not have remained out of his area of interest. He had a rich collection of rare and nearly extinct land races and cultivars of roses from the Sundarbans, Uddharanpurer Ghat, Katwa and other places.<sup>5</sup> Of particular significance is his collection of *Rosa clinophylla* (syn. *R. involucrata*) which is extensively used in breeding of new varieties by M.S. and Girija Viraraghavan.<sup>6</sup> In recognition of the lifetime's achievements of Shibaprasad Bandyopadhyay, Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya conferred on him D.Sc. *Honoris Causa* in 1984. It is a matter of great pride for Bengal Rose Society that Shib Babu had presided over the very first meeting of its founding members and later provided valuable guidance to the Society as its Vice President. We pay our heartfelt tributes to Late Dr. Shibaprasad Bandyopadhyay.



### **Ajit Kumar Dewan<sup>7</sup>**

Late Ajit Kumar Dewan, popularly known as “Ajit da”, was not only a founding member of Bengal Rose Society but was the main driving force behind the process that led to the formation of the Society and thereafter its moving forward, for as long as he was physically fit. Looking back, as a schoolboy, he was bright in studies, inquisitive and adventure-loving. He grew up in a sprawling farmhouse in Khardah that his family had inherited along with the title of “Dewan” given to his forefathers by the Nawab of Bengal. However, his interest in roses was kindled when he was in his teens and his grandfather presented him two imported rose plants for achieving outstanding results in

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<sup>3</sup> Date of demise 18<sup>th</sup> October 1995. Source: Mr. Goutamnarayan Ghosh, a former secretary of Bengal Rose Society.

<sup>4</sup> Ref. ‘Nab Bharater Luther Burbank: Shibaprasad Bandyopadhyay. Publisher: ‘JOURNAL’, Kolkata 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Ref. Guhaniyogi, Subhash, ‘Thirty-five years amidst roses and other pretty flowers’, Rose Annual 2015 Supplement, Bengal Rose Society.

<sup>6</sup> Ref. ‘Creating tomorrow’s heritage roses’ by Girija and M.S. Viraraghavan, BRS Rose Annual 2020 (in press).

<sup>7</sup> Based on inputs thankfully received from the son of Late Ajit Kumar Dewan, Sri Arabindo Dewan and his grandniece Dr. (Ms.) Priyanka De. Additional information was gathered from Sri Subhash Guhaniyogi.

his examinations<sup>8</sup>. The passion for roses might have remained dormant in Ajit Dewan's mind, as he continued to excel in his studies throughout and earned his Master's degree in Economics, from Calcutta University along with a Gold Medal. He also had keen interest in English literature so much so, that he even got enrolled for doing M.A. in English. However, for various reasons he discontinued that and took up a government job instead. It was at this stage, that his interest in roses and other kinds of garden plants grew into a strong passion and he decided to give up the job and start a nursery business on that ancestral land in Khardah. Thus began the journey of an academic turned into a nurseryman! He named his enterprise "The Suburban Horticultural Gardens" and its initial focus was on dealing in exotic horticultural plants with a view to making these available to keen enthusiasts of gardening and flower culture in India. He obtained the Import Licence from Govt. of India in 1954 – possibly one of the first in India and started importing many new varieties of roses from U. K., France, Germany and other countries which until then were not seen in Indian gardens. Inspired by this venture of Ajit da, some others also started importing varieties of roses, chrysanthemums, dahlia, gladioli, etc. In due course, Ajit Dewan of the Suburban Horticultural Gardens won the recognition of being the most authentic grower and reliable distributor of new, improved varieties of roses and other plants in the country. He also became a leading supplier of garden plants to the Belur Math of Ramakrishna Mission. Ajit da's wide reputation brought him in close contact with a number of horticultural experts and professionals across the country. Among them were, Swami Gaurishwarananda (Rammoy Maharaj) of Ramakrishna Ashram, Jayrambati, Mr. M.S. Pai of Bombay Rose Society and several others. They freely exchanged their knowledge and experiences of rose culture and its improvement. In 1978, both Swami Gaurishwarananda Ji and Ajit Da attended the first All India Rose Convention that was held in Bombay (Mumbai). It was during their discussions with other delegates of the convention, that the idea of forming a Rose Society in Kolkata, like the one in Bombay and other cities, came to Ajit da's mind. Upon returning to Kolkata, he met a number of rose lovers, nurserymen and other like-minded people and was able to convince a lot of them to come forward and join him in setting up Bengal Rose Society in 1980. Swami Gaurishwarananda kindly consented to become its first President with Shib babu and Late Ajoy Ghosal as its two Vice Presidents. Ajit da was the obvious choice of all to be its Secretary on whose shoulders remained the main responsibility of running the organisation. He tried his best to fulfill his next dream, of bringing the All India Rose Convention to Kolkata. For that he took help of the second President of the Society Justice Ganendra Narayan Ray in meeting Justice K.K. Dubey a Past President of Indian Rose Federation then visiting Kolkata, and requested him to let Bengal Rose Society to hold a Convention in Kolkata. As a result of the untiring efforts of Ajit da, the XI All India Convention was finally allotted to Kolkata for January 1991. The next thing was meeting the challenge of organising a major event like that while Ajit da was not getting any younger. Fortunately, a lot of people came forward to stand by him to make this event a great success. Particular mention should be made of Late Ajoy Ghosal who ably shouldered the responsibility of the Secretary of the Organising Committee. Ajoy da continued to work tirelessly for Bengal Rose Society for many years. As an individual, Ajit da was an assuming, humble and friendly person who would go out of his way in helping

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<sup>8</sup> These according to Subhash Guhaniyogi, were of the varieties 'Mrs. John Laing' and 'Rev. J. B. M. Camm' – both having scented pink flowers.

others, even when he did not owe anything to them. In 1999, he met with an accident and suffered brain injury. He did recover from that but passed away on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2001, when he was well over 90 years of age. Bengal Rose Society pays its highest tributes to Late Ajit Kumar Dewan without whose untiring initiative and dedication, this Society would not have become a reality.