

# **Professor G.S. Sanyal: Bhisham Pitamaha of IIT Kharagpur**

**By: Puran Dang**

The late Professor G.S. Sanyal is one of those kind and gentle personalities who leave a permanent impression on all people. He was born in Assam and grew up in West Bengal, he was a very intelligent and able person. He got his degree in Engineering and did advanced studies in UK and USA. I feel so fortunate that I live in Lexington, Mass. Prof. Sanyal told me that he worked in MIT Lincoln Lab in Lexington for some time doing his research. He became a professor in IIT Kharagpur and served there all his life. He was wedded to this great Institute as a professor, Head of the Department of Electronics & Telecommunication, its Director. He was Chairman of the Technology Foundation. He loved students and treated them as their father giving them advice not only as teacher but also as a mentor and a well-wisher solving their personal difficulties as if they belonged to him. His gentle and informal disposition attracted one and all who not only respected him but loved him.

Prof. Sanyal gave his 57 years to IIT Kharagpur in various capacities. As a professor he taught his students but stayed in touch with them even in social activities. He was head of Gymkhana and Warden of RK Hall. He did all this because he loved students.

About 25 years ago, he visited Boston along with the then Director, Professor K.L. Chopra. I requested them to stay at our home which they gladly did. My wife, Kamlesh and I were very fortunate to have them for a few days. Both he and Professor Chopra made us feel as if they were members of our family. Love was all around in our home. Prof. Sanyal's gentle voice and smile made my two daughters feel as if he was their grandfather. They felt so good and told me "Your professor is very cute" which put all of us to a hearty laughter.

Prof. Chopra and all of us would be sitting together and suddenly Prof. Sanyal would disappear. We would find him outside of the house in the lawn having a comfortable puff of his cigarette and seeing us gave a big smile with a twinkle in his eyes. I loved it!

As I said, he loved his students. Arjun Malhotra was his favorite student and admired his professor so much that later after he became a most successful entrepreneur, he gave crores of rupees to build a great Telecommunication Institute on the Campus of IIT-Kgp. Arjun could name this Institute in his name but out of his love and respect for his teacher, he named it as “G.S. Sanyal Institute of Telecommunication” to honor his teacher! What a loving gesture!

Arjun has written to me:

**“There are some teachers who influence you and mold you not just from an academic point but as a person and as a Role Model.”**

While Prof. Chopra and Prof. Sanyal were with us, we met Vinod Gupta at the Boston Airport. Over a cup of tea/coffee, Vinod Gupta School of Management was born. Vinod Gupta got his degree at IIT-Kgp in Agriculture in 1967 but he was close to Prof. Sanyal. Maybe he became close to the professor when he was living in RK Hall where Prof. Sanyal was the Warden. I have very close friendship with Vinod.

Vinod’s deep respect for Prof. Sanyal is reflected in few but most affectionate words **“Professor Sanyal is like a saint to me”**. In these few words, Vinod said it all.

Prof. Sanyal never retired from IIT-Kgp; Vinod requested him to be an Advisor to the Vinod Gupta School of Management. Prof. Sanyal did a fantastic job on so many levels to promote this school and IIT-Kgp at large.

About ten years ago, my alma-mater, IIT-Kgp, honored me with the First “Distinguished Service Award” in the Kalidas Auditorium. Thanks to Professor Acharya and Professor Amit Patra who supported me for this honor. They are my very dear friends.

Prof. Sanyal was not keeping well because of his respiration problem but he came to the event. After the Gold Medal wrapped around my neck, I ran to Prof. Sanyal and wrapped the medal around his neck. Prof. Sanyal gave his usual smile and twinkle in his eyes. I can never forget his face with a glow of happiness for me!

It is not possible to include hundreds of his students and admirers in this short article, but I did approach some of his students and Associates to say something about him. Prof. Chopra wrote an emotional obituary for Prof. Sanyal and ended it with these words of the famous English Poet, Walter Scott:

**"Lives of great men all remind us**

**We can make our lives sublime**

**And while departing, leave behind us**

**Footprints on sands of time"**

**His favorite student, Arjun Malhotra writes:**

**"Prof. Sanyal influenced us as a Role Model."**

**Partha Ghosh, Distinguished Alumnus, writes:**

**"Dr. Sanyal was a person who continually harmonized three kinds of energies, Spiritual, Intellectual and Physical to create a beautiful glow and music of life in enlightening the environment around him."**

**Prof. P.P. Chakrabarty writes:**

**"I learnt a lot from his philosophy. He was and remains IITKGP's original Bheeshma Pitamaha."**

**His student, R. Gopalakrishnan, writes:**

**"Prof. Sanyal's most enduring contribution has been his child-like warmth for the students and ability to stay connected with them."**

**Prof. Ravikumar Bhaskaran, Former Dean at IIT-Kgp has written:**

**"Prof. Sanyal was always very kind to me, and I used to consider him as a father figure."**

**Prof. Amit Patra, Professor & Former Dean of Alumni Affairs writes:**

**“That Prof. Sanyal had a great curiosity about Science and Engineering and even before his death, he was discussing with me some new ideas with him.”**

**Prof K.L. Chopra, Former Director of IIT-KGP wrote the following in his tribute to Prof. Sanyal:**

**“Whatever I achieved during my two terms as Director, IITKGP from 1987-1997, I owe much to the help of GS.”**

**Prof. Avijit Gangopadhyay, states:**

**“He is a great example of what we saw every day in our IIT life ‘Dedicated to the service of the nation’.”**

**Prof. B.N. Chatterji, IIT-KGP Professor says:**

**“He used to give positive advice even at his last phase of life. His absence is a great loss to me and my friends.”**

**Prof. Madhu Chakraborty, Former Deputy Director of IIT-KGP:**

**“His love and affection gave strength to venture into new domains. Even now when I face a challenge, I wish, I could consult him.”**

**Prof. Subrata Chattopadhyay, Dean of Alumni Affairs at IIT-KGP:**

**“He was an extremely respected professor, at the same time, he would freely and openly socialise with one and all, as a man next door.”**

**Final words from Puran Dang:**

**Prof. Sanyal is one of those figures who will always guide and teach me as to what life is all about. His loving and kind face will never vanish from my**

memory. He taught and guided thousands of students to be good human beings first and financial achievers after. When history of IIT Kharagpur is written, his name will stand out as the most kind and benevolent father figure.

Our President, Dr. Radhakrishnan, wrote in his book “Essays and Reflections on Gandhi” (I read this book several decades ago in which he wrote something like this):

That greatness of man shall not be measured by how much wealth he has made and how many empires he has broken and conquered but by what good he has done to humanity.

It is very true for our Prof. Sanyal. He lived a simple life and spread his love and kindness to all around him.

I read one poem by an English poet, James Shirley, in my High School:

*“Kings and crowns shall tumble down*

*And with the dust be equally made*

*Only the actions of the just*

*Shall blossom and flourish in the dust*

*This was our Professor Sanyal. I bow my head in his memory.*

*God bless Prof. Sanyal in the heavens!*

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