Dr. Prabir Ranjan Bhowal: RIP

It has indeed been a privilege to have known Prabir. We first met during the ragging period in the July of 1964 in Nehru Hall and remained close ever since. We soon learned how brilliant a student he was, and sure enough he graduated at the top of our metallurgical engineering class. One incident stands out in my memory. One afternoon in our third year, when we had crowded into Professor M. R. Das's office wanting to know our marks in our very first physical metallurgy quiz, he expressed his utter dissatisfaction with our performance, except for Prabir who had aced the test.

Prabir and I were together in Nehru Hall till he completed his DIIT and left for the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for doctoral studies while I stayed back in Kharagpur for my graduate studies. Thereafter there were occasional exchanges of letters and the couple of rare occasions we met were when he came to visit his parents in Kolkata. His father was bedridden, but his mother was very active. We had sumptuous meals so lovingly served by her during my stay. During one of these visits in the late 1970's, Prabir took me to his sisters' residences in Bagha-Jatin and I recall spending a lovely evening watching a Bangla movie. This was our last but memorable meeting. Even today whenever I pass by this area, I can't help but recall our happy days.

In later years we lost contact. Recently, thanks to COVID, our classmate Raj Goel started a monthly zoom meeting that brought our class together and helped us reconnect. Prabir attended many of these to reminisce about the good old days. His voice was loud and clear. I was impressed with his eagerness to learn even in his retirement years. His new passion was exploring quantum mechanics and game theory.

Prabir spent his childhood in Dibrugarh, Assam until the early 1960's when the political turmoil forced his father, a well-known physician there, to move the family to Kolkata. Despite growing up in tumultuous times, Prabir persevered facing whatever challenges came his way to have a brilliant academic career. No wonder he topped our metallurgical engineering batch and went on to higher studies at one of the premier academic institutes in the USA.

After his PhD, Prabir worked in several aerospace companies. He published several seminal papers on the development of superalloys for aero gas turbine disks and was issued many patents.

My one regret is that I never could meet his wife, Sujata. From our recent WhatsApp messages, it is evident that she is indeed a remarkable lady. Prabir was indeed fortunate to have her as his life companion. The care and support provided by her and their sons Samit and Shayan during these difficult times helped him cope with his difficult last days.

May his soul rest in peace.

May God give his family strength to overcome these difficult times.

Rabindra Nath Ghosh, 1969 Met Engineering, Nehru Hall
(Dr. R. N. Ghosh earned a PhD in metallurgical engineering while serving as a lecturer at IIT before moving to National Metallurgical Laboratory, Jamshedpur, where he served in different capacities for over 25 years. He came back to IIT Kharagpur and served as a Chair Professor, Department of Metallurgical & Materials Engineering until June 2016.)