

Renowned biochemist, a Padma Bhushan awardee, Prof P Balaram delivers special talk on Coronavirus at KU



Srinagar, June 2: Globally-acclaimed biochemist Prof P Balaram, a recipient of the country's third highest civilian honour Padma Bhushan in 2014, delivered a special talk on 'Reflections on Science in the Age of Coronavirus' at the University of Kashmir on Friday, days after three Padma Shri awardees joined the deliberations during a national symposium in the Varsity.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Nilofer Khan presided over the lecture session, which was attended by a large number of academics, research scholars and students from teaching departments of the University and few other higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Kashmir. Dean of Academic Affairs, Prof F A Masoodi, and Registrar Dr Nisar A Mir were also present.

Prof Balaram, a former director of the prestigious Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, was invited by the KU's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Innovations (CIRI) to deliver the special talk.

Saying that "nothing of the scale and magnitude of Coronavirus has ever happened in the living memory", Prof Balaram said the pandemic was a "force of the nature which consumed more than 6 million people worldwide."

"What the Coronavirus pandemic did was that it unified the world and brought science to the public imagination at large," he said.

Prof Balaram elucidated in great detail the history and evolution of the Coronavirus, also drawing from his personal experiences during the Covid lockdown how he spent a great amount of time investigating the discoverer(s) of the Coronavirus.

He urged young students to study Biology in equal measure as Chemistry, referring to how a host of significant biological, chemical and physical processes have evolved throughout the course of history as a result of the study of Biology and Chemistry.

About the lessons from the pandemic, Prof Balaram said it demonstrated how “the nature periodically provides a reminder of the limits of human arrogance and ignorance and how nature demonstrates that the frontiers of science are truly endless.”

“It (the pandemic) also showed that Biology assisted by the Chemistry of Molecular Variation is a formidable force of nature,” he said.

In her concluding remarks, Prof Nilofer Khan said such special talks serve as a great learning experience for students from the vast expertise of eminent scientists like Prof Balaram, besides pushing the boundaries of their understanding and knowledge of science. The VC thanked Prof Balaram for agreeing to deliver the talk on Coronavirus.

“Our students must make the best of such rare opportunities where they get to interact with such distinguished academics face-to-face,” Prof Nilofer said, complimenting the CIRI for organising the important event.

Coordinator, CIRI, Dr Mohd Altaf Bhat, earlier gave a brief overview of the pioneering works of Prof Balaram, a member of all three science academies of India and a recipient of TWAS Prize (1994).

Notably, on May 25, three Padma Shri awardees were part of deliberations during a three-day national symposium on ‘Earthquake, Landslide and Glacial Hazards’ in the University. These included earth scientist Prof Harsh K Gupta, geophysical scientist Dr V P Dimri and geologist Dr V C Thakur.