Obituary

Shristi Dhar Chatterji: 1935–2017

Shristi Dhar Chatterji, who was elected a member of the London Mathematical Society on 11 March 1977, died on 28 September 2017, aged 82.

J.D.M. Wright writes: Professor Shristi Dhar Chatterji died unexpectedly, after a short illness, in Lausanne, Switzerland.

He was born in Lucknow, India, on 29 July 1935. He attended the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta (ISI). Then he travelled widely in the USA and Europe before becoming a permanent professor at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). He was President of the Swiss Mathematical Society from 1986-87.

He was expert in probability theory and functional analysis and deeply knowledgeable over a wide range of mathematics. Among his major achievements was his work on martingales with values in a Banach space X. He showed that martingale convergence theorems work precisely when X has the Radon-Nikodym property. His extensive research publications in classical and functional analysis show his powerful originality combined with profound and subtle insights.

His epic three volume Cours d’analyse arose from his lecture courses at the EPFL. He also founded, and for many years edited, the journal Expositiones Mathematicae. His interest in the history of mathematics led him to translate Euler’s Letters to a German princess from German into French. With H. Wefelscheid he edited G.C. Young and W.H. Young: Selected papers. Among his other historical writings he gives a masterly account of the life and work of Norbert Wiener.

Chat, as he was known to all his friends, was phenomenally gifted at languages. It was not just that he knew many languages — he had mastered them. His mother tongue was Bengali but his spoken English had no trace of a foreign accent and he spoke Italian like an Italian. Probably similar things could be said about his French, German, Danish and Hindi. At home he spoke Italian. This was natural since his wife, Carla, came from the Italian part of Switzerland. They married in 1967 and, just a few weeks before his death, celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary with a trip to Italy. He was delighted that their daughter, Indira, became a professional mathematician.

For many years Chat would come to London in November for the LMS AGM and Annual Dinner, and would make a side trip to Oxford. David Edwards wrote: “I always enjoyed his visits here enormously. He was not only an extremely distinguished mathematician but also wonderful company”.

Chat was a connoisseur; of food, of wine, of literature, and of mathematics. As well as his creativity in producing new mathematics he had a passion for finding elegant, insightful proofs of important known results. He once said “The discoverer of a theorem hits it with any tools that come to hand in order to get a proof. Frequently the ‘right’ argument is only found later.” This approach made him a superb teacher and expositor.

Chatterji was charismatic with prodigious intellectual gifts.

I wish to thank Professor Varadarajan and Professor Indira Chatterji for their help; in particular for sending me a copy of the memorial article which is soon to appear in Expositiones Mathematicae.