



PROF. GAMBIR SINGH YONZONE



Prof. Gambir Singh Yonzon is a distinguished botanist, educationist, environmentalist and institution builder from the Darjeeling hills and the first Indian Nepali (Gorkha) to earn an M.Sc. in Botany (1964, University of North Bengal) and a Ph.D. in Botany (1976, University of Calcutta).

2. Born on 17th November, 1939 in the remote village of Sinji, Kalimpong, Prof. Yonzon rose from modest rural beginnings to achieve international academic distinction, with academic engagements in the United Kingdom, United States, France and Argentina. As a Mondal of Sinji, his father Shri Rithu Bahadur Yonzon, along with his mother Smt. Chandra Maya Yonzon, were his first teachers at home, nurturing in him values and discipline that would later give concrete meaning not only to the Yonzon family of Sinji but also to the entire Darjeeling hill region and the nation, directly and indirectly. Over a remarkable career spanning more than five decades, he became the first hill scholar of Darjeeling to serve as Head of the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Department of Botany at Darjeeling Government College, Principal of Kalimpong College, Chairman of the West Bengal School Service Commission (Hill Region), Fulbright Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Professor at The Ohio State University (USA) and Visitor Scientist in the United Kingdom. He has also served as a Founder Member of the Academic Council of Sikkim Central University and held memberships and fellowships in several prestigious national and international scientific bodies.

3. Prof. Yonzon's contributions to the educational and intellectual advancement of the Darjeeling hill region are pioneering and far-reaching. Between 1962 and 1964, he was instrumental in establishing permanent M.Sc. courses in Botany and Zoology, along with doctoral research facilities, at Darjeeling Government College—an initiative that has enabled more than 1,200 students to pursue higher education in biological sciences and serve in responsible public and professional positions. A passionate advocate of scientific temper and environmental awareness, he led a six-year conservation movement (1978-1984) that successfully halted large-scale destruction of virgin hill forests by the West Bengal Forest Corporation and he played a key role in the establishment of Singalila and Neora Valley National Parks. His commitment to grassroots development is reflected in the establishment of the R.B. Yonzon Memorial Rural Library (1978) in his native village, donation of land for Chandra Maya High School (1983) for disadvantaged children, founding of two animal shelters in Kalimpong and Darjeeling (1992) serving thousands of animals annually and the creation of a Science Centre at Delo, Kalimpong (2008) after decades of sustained effort. An accomplished author and public intellectual, he has published seven books and numerous research and popular articles and has organized over 100 conferences, seminars and public awareness programmes on environmental, educational and socio-political issues of regional and national importance.

4. In recognition of his lifelong dedication to the welfare of the Darjeeling hills and the nation, Prof. Yonzon has received numerous honours at local, national and international levels. These include delivering the Second M.K. Baruah Memorial Lecture (1990), receiving a national award from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (1992), inclusion in the Darjeeling Forest Development Committee by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (1993) and the prestigious Fulbright Visiting Professorship at The Ohio State University (1993). He was declared a "Living Treasure of Darjeeling" by INTACH (2001), associated with the Indira Briksha Mitra Award conferred in 2007 during his tenure as Chairman of the Federation of Societies for Environmental Protection and honoured through the establishment of the Dr. G. S. Yonzon Vigyan Manch in 2012.