

Indian Scientist

Kailas Nath Kaul



(1905 – 1983)

Few scientists have combined knowledge, compassion, and national service as beautifully as Kailas Nath Kaul. A visionary botanist, naturalist, and environmentalist, Kaul was a world expert on palm trees (Arecaceae) and a key architect of India's scientific and environmental awakening. He founded the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) in Lucknow and inspired leaders like Indira Gandhi to champion environmental conservation.

"Science must live in the fields, not just in the laboratories." — K.N. Kaul

Building India's Green Science

Born in Lucknow in 1905, Kaul studied biochemistry and genetics in India and abroad, gaining a strong foundation for his scientific career. In 1948, he established NBRI, which became one of the world's top five botanical gardens. He also became the first Indian scientist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (UK) and collaborated with institutions like the Natural History Museum, London, and Cambridge University.

He led botanical surveys across India, from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari, and helped develop botanical gardens in Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. His work made Indian botany internationally respected.

Science for People

Kaul used science to solve real problems. His Banthra Formula reclaimed thousands of acres of saline land in Uttar Pradesh, helping farmers grow crops in harsh soils. In the Thar Desert, he used aerial surveys to locate freshwater aquifers, solving long-standing water shortages.

He revived Mughal gardens in Jammu and Kashmir and, as Vice Chancellor of Chandra Shekhar Azad University, strengthened agricultural research. Through his Vigyan Mandir (School of Science) program, he promoted hands-on learning for students across India.

Freedom Fighter and Reformer

Kaul joined the freedom movement in 1930, working with Gandhiji and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. He was jailed during the Civil Disobedience Movement, where he taught fellow prisoners. Later, he educated Dalit children and worked to end untouchability.

Honors and Legacy

Kaul received the Padma Bhushan in 1977, and the plant genus *Kaulinia* was named after him. The K.N. Kaul Institute of Life Sciences and K.N. Kaul Block at NBRI continue his legacy.