

Raghu Raj Bahadur 1924-1997

By Stephen M. Stigler

Raghu Raj Bahadur was born in Delhi, India on April 30, 1924. He was extremely modest in demeanor and uncomfortable when being honored, but on several occasions the Chicago Department of Statistics managed to attract him to birthday celebrations by taking advantage of the coincidence of his and Gauss's birthdates -- he would come to honor Gauss, not to receive honor for himself. At St. Stephen's College of Delhi University he excelled, graduating in 1943 with first class honors in mathematics. In 1944 he won a scholarship and generously returned the money to the College to aid poor students. But it is clear that he had not yet found his calling. In that year, 1944, his was judged the best serious essay by a student in the College. The essay gave no hint of the career that was to follow: it was a somber essay, on the isolation of individuals, and it gave a dark and pessimistic view of the search for meaning in life -- a vision that was foreign to the Raj we knew in later years. He continued on at Delhi, receiving a Masters degree in mathematics in 1945. After a year at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore he was awarded a scholarship by the government of India for graduate studies, and in October 1947, after spending one year at the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta, Raj took an unusual and fateful step. While India was in the upheaval that followed partition and preceded independence, Raj traveled to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to study mathematical statistics.

In barely over two years he completed his Ph.D. His dissertation focused on decision theoretic problems for k populations, a problem suggested by Harold Hotelling (although Herbert Robbins served as his major professor). In a December 1949 letter of reference, Harold Hotelling wrote: "His thesis, which is now practically complete, includes for one thing a discussion of the following paradox: Two samples are known to be from Cauchy populations