

# India remembers Hawking, great ambassador of science

## He gave lectures in Mumbai, Delhi during his 2001 visit

Kalyan Ray

**NEW DELHI, DHNS:** Almost two decades ago, when a bunch of Indian physicists struggled to arrange the money for Stephen Hawking's travel to India, Infosys's S D Shibulal came to their rescue.

"We experienced difficulties to find resources to bring him for the String 2001 conference in Mumbai. Then Shibulal took care of all expenses," Spenta Wadia, professor at Interna-

tional Centre for Theoretical Sciences, Bengaluru told *DH*.

In 2001, Wadia was one of the scientists at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, who was closely involved in organising the conference attended by Hawking and other physics stalwarts like Edward Witten and David Gross.

It was Hawking's last visit to India during which he also gave public lectures in Mumbai and Delhi and met then President K R Narayanan.

His first India visit was

a short trip to Lucknow in 1959— three years before he was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a motor neuron disease that bound him to wheelchair for the rest of his life.

In Mumbai, Hawking spent time at the science conference, gave a talk to scientists, delivered two public lectures, addressed a press conference and attended a banquet dinner where several top Mumbai-kars and intellectuals from various walks of life were present to have a glimpse of the star scientist and celebrated author.

He also spent time at the Hanging Garden and Nariman Point. "He also met all the chil-

dren at TIFR Housing Society, which was a wonderful experience for the kids," Wadia said.

### Waltzing his wheelchair

Another TIFR physicist Sunil Mukhi recalled celebration of Hawking's 59th birthday in Mumbai when he also did a little gig, waltzing his wheelchair.

"Popular Hindi songs were played in the background and everyone was in the mood of dancing. He too danced moving round and round in his wheelchair," said Mukhi, who is currently a professor at Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research, Pune

"Hawking was also a caring person. When we went to his



**Stephen Hawking at a reception in Mumbai in 2001.**

COURTESY SUHAS NAIK SATAM, NEHRU PLANETARIUM, MUMBAI

hotel to see him off after the Mumbai events, he asked all of us to have something before leaving," he said.

One of his public lectures in Mumbai was at the Shanmukhanada Hall, which has a capacity to accommodate

3,000 people. "It was a Sunday, but the hall was overflowing. Everyone was carrying his book (*A Brief History of Time*)," recalled Suhas B Naik-Satam, programme coordinator (scientific) Nehru Planetarium, Mumbai. The scene was no different at Siri Fort auditorium in Delhi where the celebrated physicist gave a public lecture on the topic "From Astrology and Black Hole."

He enjoyed Indian food like rice, curry and kebab as stated by Sharon Brown, one of the nurses accompanying him. "We will remember him as a great ambassador of science," said Wadia.

**DH News Service**