

## Obituary

*No legacy is so rich as honesty.*

-William Shakespeare

### Professor R. Narayana Swamy – An Obituary

In the demise of Prof. R. Narayana Swamy (RNS) on 20.10.2011, the MSI has lost one of its founder members. Prof. RNS joined the Centre for Advanced Studies in Botany (CAS), University of Madras as a faculty and served for nearly 30 years before retiring as a professor towards the end of 1993. He was born on 19-11-1933 to M.S. Rama Aiyar and Subbambal and had his early education in P.M. Municipal High School, Palghat, Kerala.

He did his intermediate from Zamorin's College, Calicut followed by B.Sc (Hons) from Presidency College, Madras in the year 1954. He obtained his M.Sc. in 1959 from the University of Madras. He acquired his Ph.D. from the Madras University in 1963 and joined the CAS as a lecturer in 1964. The research focus of CAS during this time was taxonomy of fungi and fungal pathogenesis of crops. Early in his career, Prof. RNS created a niche for himself by initiating research on fungal physiology. His research team studied light-induced sporulation of plant pathogenic fungi including *Cercospora personata* (Berk. & M.A. Curtis) Ellis & Everh., the causal organism of leaf spot of ground nut and several species of *Phoma* and *Pestalotiopsis* and devised methods to obtain rapid and copious sporulation of these recalcitrant fungi. Research publications which emanated from his lab added to the

then existing knowledge on photosporulation. With the ultimate aim of identifying the photoreceptor in these fungi, he advised his students to tackle the problem of photosporulation from various angles including methods that would mimic the photo effect. Although his school succeeded in identifying a few stimuli that could replace the light requirement for sporulation in these fungi, the photoreceptor eluded identification. Not to be daunted, Prof. RNS went on to study light-induced changes in the protein and respiratory metabolism of plant pathogenic fungi and also the phenomenon of synchronous sporulation.

Prof. RNS was equally fascinated by other fields of science such as physics and mathematics. Once, an infra-red gas analysing machine arrived in the lab sans its instruction manual. Before the manual could be obtained, Prof. RNS calibrated it using gas-filled football bladders and Hamilton syringes; he published a note on this method along with Mr. B. Srinivasan of CAS.

We, as research students under his mentorship learnt the nuances of experimental design, research methodology, manuscript writing and the importance of statistics in interpreting the results of the experiments. Prof. RNS had a great sense of humour, and was never afraid of voicing the truth. He was a man of unassailable morals. It was this character of his that was infectious and his students imbibed it from him unconsciously.

The demise of Prof. RNS is great personal loss to me since he was in every sense, a friend, philosopher and guide to me. In the year 1979, I joined RKM Vivekananda College and began my research career there using the one dozen Petri dishes and a few Erlenmeyer flasks which he lent me. I used to visit him in his lab every Saturday to discuss the course of my research in the college and in this way he continued to be my research guide for several years after even my obtaining a Ph.D. under his mentorship in 1979. Many of us who knew him intimately feel that he deserved much more than what was accorded to him academically.

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