

## Prakash Sarvotham Shetty (1943–2018)

Professor Prakash Shetty (PS), CEO of the Research Programme Consortium (RPC) on 'Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA)' (<http://www.lansasouthasia.org>) led by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), till recently, passed away in London on Monday, 3 September 2018, after fighting cancer for about seven years.

Born on 28 September 1943, PS had his early education in Mangaluru; he graduated with an MBBS degree from Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore in 1968 followed by MD from CMC in 1972 and Ph D from University of Cambridge in 1980. He had a long and distinguished career starting as Professor and Chairman, Department of Physiology, St John's Medical College, Bengaluru from 1981 to 1993; he was in addition, Director and Programme Coordinator from 1985 to 1993 of the Nutrition Research Centre (Indian Council of Medical Research) that he established at the College. Moving to the United Kingdom in 1993, he was Professor of Human Nutrition and Head of Public Health Nutrition Unit, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London from 1993 to 2001. He had a stint with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Rome, as Chief, Nutrition Planning, Assessment and Evaluation, Food and Nutrition Division from 2001 to 2005; and was Professor of Public Health Nutrition, University of Southampton School of Medicine from 2005 to 2015. PS was Editor-in-Chief of the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* from 2006 to 2011. He also continued as Emeritus Professor of Physiology and Nutrition at St John's Medical College, Bengaluru till the end.

PS was elected Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health (FFPH) of the Royal College of Physicians in 2000 and Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (FRCP), London in 2006; he was an Accredited Nutritionist of the Institute of Biology, London and Nutrition Society, UK and Registered Public Health Nutritionist (RPHN) of the Nutrition Society, UK. He served as a consultant to WHO, FAO and other UN agencies. He was the first recipient of the Dr S. G. Srikantia Memorial Lecture Award instituted by the Nutrition Society of India (NSI) in

1989; he was also awarded the Dr C. Gopalan Oration Award of the NSI in 2003. PS guided and mentored several students during his long teaching career and has several publications to his credit.

It seldom happens that a young medical graduate with sufficient family resources to set up a private practice chooses instead to shift towards study of the academic dimensions of medical healthcare. Mild disagreements with PS's decision might have arisen among his parents and close relatives, but a highly cultured household did let him do what



he exactly wanted. Almost four decades later, one of us (PCK), whose wife happens to be his first cousin, asked him why he did not set up medical practice either in Bengaluru or Mangaluru. He said that there are many doctors to treat people after they become patients with one or other disease, but there are an infinitesimally few with medical background to treat the apparently normal looking but indeed physiologically impaired people due to insufficient intake of vitamins and micronutrients such as iron, iodine, zinc, etc. He admired M. S. Swaminathan (MSS), Founder, MSSRF, for the choice of the expression 'hidden hunger' to describe this invisible malady. This admiration for one of us (MSS), for his well planned strategy of eradicating caloric hunger over five decades ago, and then 'protein hunger' and finally and more recently the 'hidden hunger' revealed his close understanding of the strategy of MSSRF's quest for a hunger-free India and world. During the last phase of his life, Prakash emerged as the first among the equals, to lead the LANSA consortium with its hub at MSSRF.

PS was CEO of the LANSA RPC from October 2012 to July 2018. He brought his vast experience of over three decades in the field of public health nutrition into leading the LANSA RPC and provided exemplary stewardship to LANSA both in terms of intellectual contribution and rigour and as an administrator. His roots in South Asia and a deep understanding of the problems in the region and having had a distinguished international career, placed him in a unique position to steer this South Asia focused research consortium with both international partners (Institute of Development Studies (IDS), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Leverhulme Centre for Integrative Research on Agriculture and Health (LCIRAH)), and partners from Bangladesh (Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC)), Pakistan (Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR)) and led by MSSRF from India (Afghanistan was the other focus country of LANSA research). PS was also someone respected by and acceptable to all South Asian partners, notwithstanding tensions between some of the countries in the region.

An erudite scholar with a large heart, PS was simple, unassuming and easily approachable. Deep understanding of the subject, conceptual clarity and lucidity of expression were his forte. Always ready to listen, provide guidance, offer advice and extend support as required, he endeared himself to everyone. As CEO of LANSA, he had to give fifty per cent of his time to the RPC. While continuing to be based in London, he came to MSSRF at least twice a year and stayed at the Foundation's guest house on campus. The reaction of shock and sadness expressed by everyone who knew him at the Foundation, on hearing the news of his demise, from the office housekeeping staff and the guest house caretaker to particularly the LANSA team at MSSRF, each of whom has gained something from their interaction with him, speaks volumes of the fine human being he was.

PS was a fighter till the end. It was soon after undergoing surgery for cancer that he took charge of the LANSA RPC in late 2012. The disease recurred and he underwent surgery again in late 2014, early 2016 and the last in early 2018. He

bounced back each time and continued to provide the necessary support and stewardship to LANSAs till the disease overpowered him and the body gave in. The deterioration in his health was particularly fast towards the last few weeks, leading to his stepping down as CEO in early August. By that time, the programmatic phase of the RPC was over and he was aware that only the project completion requirements remained; and the end came in early September. LANSAs, his wife Nandini Shetty said, was very dear to him and he was very happy to have got the opportunity to lead it.

PS was also a multifaceted personality with a sense of humour, interest in history and love for Carnatic music. He always made it a point to go for music concerts when he was in Chennai. An ideal leader, guide and a friend one could always depend on, the entire LANSAs Consortium is grateful and indebted to him for his 'fantastic leadership', as recorded in the minutes of the consortium management team meeting held in early August, soon after he stepped down as CEO. MSS

recalled having met PS during his stint at FAO and remembered Jacque Diouf, the then Director General of FAO referring to PS as an asset to the organization, when sharing his thoughts at the condolence meeting organized at MSSRF on 6 September to pay respects to PS. Referring to PS as a modest man, he said that, '*PS was an ideal moral teacher who cared for his students; we have much to learn from his humility, smiling nature, management values and leadership.... The important thing is to remember why he was admired and strive to imbibe those qualities.*'

His passing is a great loss to the world of nutrition, to MSSRF and to the LANSAs Consortium; he will be missed by his students and by all who knew him and worked with him. PS will be particularly remembered for his seminal contributions in the fields of food and nutrition security and leveraging agriculture for nutrition. In short, PS was a scientists' scientist, bringing the best in science to solve human problems. In this anthropocene era, he will always be remembered

for showing the way to achieving the goal of a hunger free South Asia and world. He was a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi who said that, 'to the hungry God is bread'. PS in his life time, worked hard to ensure that the God of bread resides in every home and hut. In spite of the work of PS and other scientists like him, widespread malnutrition still prevails in the country and region. We should adopt a life cycle approach to nutrition security beginning with the first thousand days in a child's life. This is the cause for which PS worked throughout his life and the best tribute we can pay to him is to follow the pathway he has shown.

R. V. BHAVANI\*  
P. C. KESAVAN  
M. S. SWAMINATHAN

*M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation,  
III Cross Street,  
Taramani Institutional Area,  
Chennai 600 113, India  
\*e-mail: bhavani@mssrf.res.in*