

## A titan amongst zoologists

*An obituary of B. R. Seshachar by Katre Shakuntala and M. D. Parthasarathy*

Bagepalli Ramachandrachar Seshachar (BRS), the eldest son of a village school master, was born in 1908, at Bagepalli, a small village in Kolar District, Karnataka. He had his early University education in Central College, Bangalore. In 1926, he secured his B Sc degree with a First Class First and bagged the coveted 'Manjaya Udupa' gold medal. He repeated this distinction five years later, when he secured his Master's degree from the Calcutta University. Later, in 1940, he obtained his D Sc degree from the Madras University.

Soon after his graduation, young Seshachar was inducted as a member of the faculty in the Department of Zoology, Central College. Within a short time, he became an Assistant Professor and thereafter, as a Professor, he donned the mantle of the headship of the very Department where he had started his career as a zoology student. BRS received his early guidance in zoology from the eminent teacher C. R. Narayana Rao, for whom he had unalloyed respect all through his life. In the fitness of events, later, he even named a species of Apodan amphibian as *Ureotyphlus narayani*, to perpetuate the memory of his revered mentor. In the capacity of a teacher and researcher, BRS rendered a distinguished service of 34 long years to the Zoology Department of the Central College. Being a person of rare talents, dynamism and qualities of leadership, he left an indelible mark on the lives of his students and colleagues alike and ushered the Department into dizzy heights of higher learning and erected a stable academic infrastructure to work upon. Many of his students have done well in life even in far off countries and remember with pride and privilege, the encouragement extended to them by BRS, helping some of them even financially.

Even before BRS had retired from

service of the Mysore University, in 1960, he was whisked away by the prestigious Delhi University, to head its faculty of Zoology. This opened wider horizons for his intellect and capacity, in the international arena. The postgraduate departments at Bangalore and Delhi had become synonymous with BRS. He had strengthened both the departments by setting high standards for teaching and opening new vistas in zoological research, especially in the field of Cell Biology which was his forte. His personal contribution to the science of zoology earned him several laurels. To name a few—he was a Harrison Research Fellow; a visiting Professor in Columbia University; Guest Investigator at the Rockefeller Institute; Fellow of the Zoological Society of London; Member of the Sigma Xi Society of America; President of the Indian National Science Academy; Vice-President of the International Zoology Congress at Washington; President and Fellow of the Ethological Society of India and so on. His monumental research contributions—over 130 papers, in the field of Cell Biology, Ciliate Protozoology and Apodan Biology, published in renowned national and international journals have been a beacon for the younger researchers. It is befitting that in 1965, the Madras University honoured him as the 'Outstanding Researcher in Biology'. Throughout his life, for all those who had known him, BRS was an embodiment of a sartorially accomplished strict disciplinarian. He was fiercely independent in his views and at no time compromised with inefficiency and ineptitude even if it meant incurring the displeasure of a few.

After returning from Delhi, BRS was invited and offered a chair as Professor Emeritus, in the Centre for Theoretical Studies, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore wherein his erudite counsel was

eagerly sought by a number of scientists of varying hues. Even in advancing age and till his last, he portrayed a versatile sense of analysis, wise judgement and unflagging interest in field work. His versatility was quite unimaginable—he was a bibliophile, a voracious reader, and maintained a very good personal library of choicest books, over which he must have spent a fortune throughout his life. His flair for reading covered not merely matters pertaining to zoology but also those in the realms of literature (he was particularly fond of English short stories), philosophy, ancient scriptures, Sanskrit and others. Little do his colleagues and students know that BRS served as the President of the Academy of Sanskrit Research (Melkote) during 1979–1981 and was responsible for laying the foundation for research work there. His other interests included gardening—most often tending the plants personally. He had maintained an exclusive garden and lawn in his house. He had a passion for Indian classical music and himself played on the 'veena'.

On Tuesday the 25th January 1994, the legendary 'Zoo-lion' BRS was snatched away from our midst. He succumbed to a massive heart attack at his residence in Bangalore. Although his end was quite peaceful, it has plunged all those who knew him in a pail of gloom and sorrow. His passing away all of a sudden, has created an irreparable void in the hearts and minds of innumerable fellow scientists and admirers. While we wish to record our heartfelt homage to the departed soul, it is sadly true that a titan amongst zoologists is no more.

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