

## Rajagopala Natarajan

Rajagopala Natarajan passed away at the age of 72 years on 2 December 2003 in Chennai after a brief illness. As a dedicated marine biologist, he served as Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS) in Marine Biology, Parangipettai, Annamalai University for about 20 years (1968–88). At the invitation of Anna University, he established the Ocean Data Centre at Chennai (1988–91). He was then an invited visiting faculty at the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai.

Born on 9 July 1930 in an orthodox middle class family in the holy town Chidambaram, he was educated in a government school. At Annamalai (1946–62), he was trained by renowned zoologists, R. V. Seshaiya and P. Govindan in embryology and genetics respectively. Later he bloomed into an excellent malacologist at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1963–67). In 1968, he returned to Annamalai, where under the leadership of Seshaiya, a Department of Marine Biology was being carved out of the zoology department. During its formative years, the CAS Marine Biology had the benefit of his leadership, drive and dynamism.

As a teacher, he organized the postgraduate course in marine biology and recruited students on an all-India basis. There was a time when the little fishing village of Parangipettai was flooded with Keralites, Andhrites, Maharashtrians, Bengalis and Sri Lankans. Natarajan brought grants to build up the centre from almost everywhere; he was the first Indian to bring a Colombo PL480 project for marine biology. He established linkages with a number of foreign institutions; for instance, the tie-up programme with Southampton University, UK through which many young Indians were trained abroad

and the English came to Parangipettai to undertake field work. Thus he not only brought a campus, but also a campus life for his students and faculty in that village. He enjoyed dining and sharing jokes with them. He was a great host: J. Burch (Michigan State University, USA), V. Fretter (University of Reading, UK), J. D. Burton (Southampton University, UK) and various Indian scientists, S. Z. Qasim and N. B. Nair among them, were his regular guests.



He was prolific in moulding and tailoring 'Doktorands', as many as 57 received doctoral degrees under his supervision. Not surprisingly, his students are manning positions in various national organizations ranging from funding agencies in Delhi to universities and national research laboratories. He was unique in that he trained them in diverse fields of marine biology, like hydrobiology, taxonomy, planktonology, fishery biology, mangrove ecology and so on. Most remarkably, he is the originator of marine microbiology, for which the nation will remain ever grateful to him. Some of his students like

P. Chandramohan (Goa), K. Devendran (Thiruvananthapuram), B. Nair (Kolkata) and L. Perumalsamy (Coimbatore) currently head microbiology departments.

Natarajan pioneered studies on molluscan taxonomy and resolved many complicated species by adapting morphometry and chemo-taxonomy. His contribution to marine microbiology focused on the isolation of actinomycetes from marine sediments, besides surveying the east coast for the occurrence of *vibrio* and *coliforms*, as a measure of bacterial contamination.

As a pioneer in marine biology, Natarajan played a key role in the formation and establishment of the National Institute of Oceanography and other marine biology institutions in many coastal universities. His researches attracted international attention, when he was invited to join the editorial board of international journals like *Malacologia* and *Malacological Reviews*. In 1984, the Government of Tamil Nadu honoured him with an award for his contribution to environmental sciences. He was elected to the Fellowship of the Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore in 1981.

Natarajan is survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters.

T. J. PANDIAN  
T. BALSUBRAMANIAN\*<sup>†</sup>

*School of Biological Sciences,  
Madurai Kamaraj University,  
Madurai 625 021, India*

<sup>†</sup>*CAS in Marine Biology,  
Annamalai University,  
Parangipettai 608 502, India*

*\*For correspondence.  
e-mail: stbcas@eth.net*