

T. A. Venkitasubramanian (1924–2003)

Tathamangalam Ananthanarayanan Venkitasubramanian, or TAV as he was affectionately called, passed away on 8 November 2003.

He was born on New Year's day in 1924 at Thirussur, Kerala to parents T. P. Ananthanarayana Iyer and Narayani Amma. As a student he took keen and avid interest in science and performed very well in school which he attended at Thirussur. He completed his BSc and MSc from Maharaja's College in Emakulam which has the distinction of having produced numerous luminaries in science and other areas of academics. He worked at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, in the Department of Biochemistry and was awarded Ph D by the University of Madras in the year 1951. After a four-year stint as a post-doctoral scientist during 1952–1956 in the University of Madison, Wisconsin and Columbia University, New York, USA, he resolved to return to India and took up his first job in 1956 as Senior Research Officer at the V. P. Chest Institute, Delhi, an Institution with which he remained associated for over thirty years until 1988. He continued to pursue his scientific interests from 1989 to 1994 as Emeritus Professor at the erstwhile Centre for Biochemical Technology, Delhi (CBT, present day IGIB). His long and productive scientific career over a span of more than four decades was highlighted by the publication of close to 250 articles in indexed journals.

TAV did pioneering and path-breaking work on the biochemistry of tubercle bacilli at a time when the tools that have now facilitated the study of this highly infectious pathogen were simply not available. Using the classical approach of biochemistry he unravelled the mysteries of intermediary metabolism in cultured mycobacteria and in experimental tuberculosis models. He also made original contributions to the study of another pathogen, *Aspergillus parasiticus*, particularly in relation to aflatoxin biosynthesis. His seminal contributions in these areas served to place the Department of Biochemistry, VPCI on the scientific map as one of the foremost biochemistry departments in the country and also earned him international recognition and acclaim.

For his original investigations into the lipid metabolism of tubercle bacilli, his researches on experimental tuberculosis and on the use of cheap plant proteins to

tackle the problem of protein malnutrition, he was awarded the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize in 1968. He continued to make great contributions to the study of mycobacteria, aflatoxin biosynthesis and to developing diagnostic tests for tuberculosis till the end of his long and illustrious scientific innings. He taught and inspired a whole generation of biochemists and biologists to address relevant questions and contribute meaningfully in their area



of scientific research. He ignited in his students the spirit of scientific inquiry, curiosity and independent thinking and extended to them his wholehearted support to experimentally test their ideas – which looking back was a rare privilege accorded to students, including myself, in their formative years. I consider it my deep privilege to have worked under the guidance of a scientist such as TAV in the beginning of my scientific career and shall remain forever indebted to him for exposing to me the wonderful world of microbes and emphasizing the relevance and excitement of enquiring into the life-style of human pathogens.

TAV was actively involved in promoting biochemistry and the study of mycobacteria and mycotoxins at the national level. He served the Society of Biological Chemists (India) as its President and organized the annual conference of the Society while at VPCI. He was mainly instrumental in introducing the MSc course in Biochemistry at the University of Delhi

in 1983. After his retirement from VPCI, TAV continued his scientific pursuits at CBT for a period of 5 years between 1989 to 1994 and nurtured many young research investigators.

In addition to being an eminent scientist, TAV was endowed with a combination of human qualities rarely found in one person. Although a man of few words, he will be remembered by one and all for his extraordinary humility, helpful attitude towards all who came in his contact, his warm and caring nature, his even temperament and equanimity under the most trying and testing situations and last but not the least, for the wonderful and congenial atmosphere he created in the Department. When the mycobacteria laboratory caught fire, he remained rock solid; he was more relieved that no one was hurt and the loss of property hardly seemed to perturb him. He simply arranged funds to have the laboratory renovated on the very next day! He showed us how to look at the bright side of things and recognize that in a given situation, things could be worse. When a student met with a scooter accident and had an arm in plaster, he cheered him by saying that it could have been worse and that he should consider himself lucky to have escaped with a mere broken bone!

In 1994 TAV moved to Pune and led a well deserved peaceful and retired life in the company of his wife, L. Sarada. From 1998 onwards his health began to deteriorate slowly and he passed away on 8 November 2003 on account of progressive supranuclear palsy. He is survived by his wife who herself was a medical biochemist and an accomplished musician and super-annuated after service at Maulana Azad Medical College and Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi. His passing has left a deep void in his family that includes two daughters, Viveka and Divya. He will remain forever in the hearts of his friends, colleagues and students who found in him a most lovable and approachable teacher, philosopher and guide and whose memory will continue to inspire us in our lives.

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