

A. Srikrishna (1955–2013)

Adusumilli Srikrishna, Professor of Organic Chemistry at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), affectionately called as ASK by his colleagues and admirers, passed away suddenly due to cardiac arrest on 20 January 2013 at Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, while attending to the official work.

Srikrishna was born on 1 January 1955 at Gudivada, Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh. He had an excellent academic record, and obtained B Sc (ANR College, Gudivada, 1973) and M Sc (1975) degrees in Chemistry from Andhra University, Visakhapatnam. In 1975, he joined University of Hyderabad to work with Goverdhan Mehta, and obtained M Phil (1976) and Ph D (1981) degrees in synthetic organic chemistry. Srikrishna belonged to the first batch of students to join for M Phil and had the distinction of being the first Ph D awardee of the University of Hyderabad. His Ph D thesis dealt with 'Triquinanes – synthesis and transformations'. While working for his Ph D, Srikrishna unravelled the triquinane motif hidden in Cookson's cage dione that paved the way for total synthesis of several triquinane natural products like coriolin, hirsutene, capnellene, etc. In 1982, he proceeded to USA for postdoctoral work, initially with Philip Eaton at the University of Chicago (1982–83) and later with Gilbert Stork at Columbia University (1983–85). At both the places, he richly contributed to the total synthesis of complex molecules of contemporary interest.

Srikrishna joined the Department of Organic Chemistry, IISc, Bangalore, in June 1985, as a Lecturer and was promoted to Assistant Professor (1989), Associate Professor (1994) and Professor (1999). He also served the Department as the Chairman during 2003–2005.

Srikrishna, a brilliant and creative organic chemist that he was, carved a niche for himself in the realm of organic synthesis. His contributions in the area of natural products synthesis, particularly total synthesis of terpenoids, are outstanding. During the early stages of his career, Srikrishna studied radical reactions for the synthesis of complex natural products. Subsequently, he, extensively and ingeniously, harnessed the abundantly available 'chirons', R- and S-carvones for the enantiospecific construction of complex natural and unnatural products.

More than a hundred publications on the total synthesis and approaches towards the total synthesis of complex natural products from this innocuous monoterpene amply illustrate the original thinking and the craftsmanship with which he transformed this simple entity to complex natural products. Total synthesis



of pupukeanones, thapsanes, valeriananoids A–C, 4-thiocyanatoneopupukeanane, mayurone, thujopsenes, crinipellins and other sesquiterpenes containing three contiguous Quaternary carbon atoms are some brilliant paradigms of the creative and astute synthetic manoeuvres of Srikrishna. Some of his innovative contributions include tactical use of the Claisen rearrangement, intramolecular diazo insertion, reductive cleavage sequence, heat and light sequence in synthesis of cage systems and linear, angular and bridged triquinane natural products.

Endowed with an exceptional ability to infer the spectroscopic details of organic compounds, Srikrishna displayed a special talent in applying this technique to unravel some of the enigmatic rearrangements and reactions. He had an uncanny ability to visualize reaction pathways in terpenoid chemistry. His inquisitiveness coupled with his innate ability to solve intricate NMR problems was an instant draw to students to flock to his course on the topic. It was a regular feature for the students, colleagues from the department and practitioners from other laboratories in India to seek his counsel for solving their own NMR spectral problems.

A strong advocate of synthetic organic chemistry and a prolific publisher of research work, Srikrishna published 290 papers in journals of national and international repute. Some of his research papers are now part of textbooks/mono-

graphs of organic synthesis. He guided about 28 doctoral students and several postdoctoral fellows. Almost all of his research students occupy prime positions in academic institutes of repute or in industry. His received many awards and recognitions, including the INSA medal for young students (1987), Dr S. H. Zaheer Young Scientist Award (1993), B. M. Birla Science Award (1994), Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize (1997), R. D. Desai Commemoration Medal (1996), A. B. Kulkarni Endowment Lecture (1998) and Prof. S. Swaminathan Endowment Award (2002). He was also DST J.C. Bose National Fellow. Srikrishna was elected to the Fellowship of all the three science academies of the country. He was a member of the Editorial Board of the *Indian Journal of Chemistry* and *Proceedings of the Indian National Science Academy*.

For all his achievements, Srikrishna was an extremely modest and simple individual with strong convictions and principles. His dedication, discipline and integrity to the pursuit of science were impeccable. He had a reputation as a great speaker. He used to visit even remote colleges and universities in the country to interact with the faculty and students. He had soft corner for students coming out of universities and colleges located in rural/semi-urban settings. A most sought-after mentor for research work in the Department, Srikrishna inspired many young scientists to better their research career. In his untimely demise, Indian science has lost a stalwart and personally; we have lost a distinguished friend and colleague.

Besides being passionately involved in the pursuit of chemistry, he had another humane side, less known to many. He deeply yearned for educational facilities for the less privileged and had personally supported the higher education of quite a few deserving but indigent students.

Srikrishna leaves behind his wife and two daughters, besides a host of friends, colleagues and admirers.

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