

## Narayana Krishna Pillai (1921–2013)

A reputed teacher and an internationally renowned carcinologist, Narayana Krishna Pillai passed away on 16 March 2013. He was one of the most distinguished marine taxonomists India has ever produced and is remembered for his outstanding work on parasitic copepods of India.

Pillai was born in 1921 in Tiruvalla, Kerala as the eighth child of K. Narayana Pillai and K. Kalayani Amma. He obtained his M Sc degree from the University of Kerala (erstwhile University of Travancore) for his taxonomic study on the Brachyuran crabs of Kerala. He was then appointed as a technical staff in a fishery development scheme of the post-war development programme of the Government of India, at the Marine Biology Laboratory. For his studies on the isopod parasites, Pillai was awarded the PhD degree in 1958 by the University of Kerala.

Pillai started his career as Research Assistant in 1942 in the Marine Biology Laboratory of the University of Kerala and was then promoted as Research Officer, Reader and then Professor, in 1981, he retired as Professor from the Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, University of Kerala. He was awarded emeritus professorship by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi.

From the study of Brachyura he passed on to Isopoda, then to Amphipoda, Mysidacea and finally to Copepoda. Pillai firmly believed that taxonomic studies on Indian fauna, one of the richest in the world, are deplorably lacking and so decided to contribute his might. He was a dedicated worker and his unwavering devotion to taxonomy contributed largely to his success as a crustacean taxonomist. For his taxonomic studies, Pillai himself collected the specimens, studied them without the help of any assistants, inked his illustrations and typed

his manuscripts. His work on Hypesriidea in the collection of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute at Cochin, the Mysidacea collected by the International Indian Ocean Expedition and *Fauna of India* volume on the copepod parasites of fishes published by Zoological Survey of India, deserve special mention and serve as proof of his immense contributions in the field of carcinology.

Pillai was an ideal research guide. His personal interest and stubborn insistence on the accuracy of the text, and above



all, the high quality of the illustrations led to a series on international publications in carcinology. He discovered a blind cat fish *Horaglanis krishnai* and a mysid *Spelaeomysis longipes* from the subterranean habitats of India, both species with considerable zoogeographical significance. The discovery of *Spelaeomysis* from South India was highly significant as it explained the discontinuous distribution of this genus on a global scale.

Years of continuous taxonomic work with the old-fashioned vertical monocular microscope resulted in cervical and lumbar spondylosis, yet Pillai never lost interest in taxonomy. Even after retire-

ment he continued work on the copepod parasites of fishes. Even during a few weeks before his demise, Pillai could recollect all the scientific names of the specimens he had worked with his contacts with colleagues such as Z. Kabata, R. Cressy, J. H. Stock and Ju-Shey Ho. Moreover, he always expressed his concerns over the decline of interest in taxonomy of marine fauna in India.

Pillai played a pivotal role in nurturing the second generation of carcinologists in India. Even after his demise, he will be remembered through a series of organisms named after him: *Horaglanis krishnai*, *Proclavellodes pillai*, *Heterochondria pillai*, *Abasia pillai*, *Amphilochus pillai*, *Scambicornus pillai* and *Lernanthropus pillai* are a few in this category. One of the world's leading parasitologists, Zbigniew (Bob) Kabata who worked at the Pacific Biological Station, Canada named a new genus of copepod parasite of India (*Pillainus*) after Pillai. All these will remain as solid proof of his acceptance in the Western world as a leading carcinologist India has ever produced.

Pillai's expertise in crustacean taxonomy is legendary and his guidance and goodwill are greatly appreciated. He is survived by two daughters. Pillai has left a great void, hard to fill not only to his students and colleagues in the University of Kerala, but all the taxonomists in India will surely feel his absence, especially in the era of taxonomic impediment.

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