

Human qualities

An obituary of Professor J. Jayaraman

The untimely demise of Prof. J. Jayaraman on 1 February 1992 after a brief illness represents the loss of a good scientist, an excellent teacher, a dedicated educationist and, above all, a fine human being. JJ, as he was affectionately called by all who knew him, was a multifaceted personality. Hailing from the Sarma school of biochemistry in Bangalore, his early contributions were in the area of coenzyme Q and ubiquinones. Subsequently he embarked on the study of glucose-mediated repression of respiratory functions in yeast, and its alleviation, control, consequences, etc. This led him to studies on the biogenesis of mitochondria and mitochondrial gene expression in yeast, an area in which he was involved till death intervened. Over the past decade or so he got interested in the chemodynamics of xenobiotic agents in the environment, not a very fashionable field of study but an important and useful one. He has published close to a hundred papers, most of them of excellent standard.

The best aspects of JJ's personality relate to his commitment to education and his human qualities. He was a teacher par excellence. Generations of students whom he had taught over the past two decades will bear testimony to his qualities as a teacher. Teaching was a passion with him. He rarely missed a lecture unless prevented by illness or other commitments. Perhaps nothing can be a better tribute to JJ as a teacher than the fact that, during the last hours of his life, in a state of delirium

preceding coma, he began lecturing on the Michaelis-Menten equation. He firmly believed that a scientist's personality is never complete unless he/she involved himself/herself in teaching to the extent possible.

Apart from personal teaching, JJ was also dedicated to education as a whole. He started in the early seventies a certificate course in biochemistry (the CCBC programme, as it was called) for college teachers. Many teachers, not



only from Tamil Nadu but from other states as well, have undergone this 6-8-week programme, in which JJ and his team taught basic biochemistry theory and some experiments that could be done without the need of fancy equipment and with local resources. This brought about a revolution in the attitudes of botany and zoology teachers, who accepted biochemistry as an integral part of life sciences. Eventually this led to the introduction of biochemistry as a

subject in the BSc botany and zoology courses. In the recent past, as honorary director of the Biological Curriculum Development Centre, School of Biological Sciences, Madurai Kamaraj University, JJ was instrumental in organizing several workshops to assess, update and modernize the syllabi of many branches of life sciences at undergraduate and post graduate levels. Even a few days before his death, he collected a bunch of young and enthusiastic lecturers and postdoctoral fellows and got them to come up with hundreds of questions in molecular biology, biochemistry and genetics for inclusion in question banks.

JJ will be best remembered for his human qualities. He was accessible to people at all levels—faculty, research scholars, students, nonteaching personnel, even janitors and sweepers. He would listen to their problems and grievances with patience and compassion, offer them sane advice and do whatever was in his capacity to help them. This quality of his endeared him to all people. His ready wit, excellent sense of humour, capacity to pun with words and laugh made his company a delightful experience. Personally, he had been a friend and constant companion to me for almost eighteen years. I will be one among the many who will miss him for a long time to come.

R. JAYARAMAN

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