

R. Subrahmanyam (1919–2006)

R. Subrahmanyam, eminent phycologist and an expert on marine phytoplankton, breathed his last on 5 March 2006 after a prolonged illness. In him, India has lost an eminent phycologist and I have lost a true friend, philosopher and guide. Subrahmanyam hailed from Pazhayamur in the erstwhile Cochin state and was born on 31 January 1919. After a brilliant academic career in school and college, he took his B.Sc. degree in Botany from Madras Christian College with a first class. He was awarded a Research Scholarship by the University of Madras and worked under the guidance of M. O. P. Iyengar at the University Botany Laboratory (now Centre of Advanced Study in Botany) and obtained an MSc degree in 1943. His work on the cytology and life-history of diatoms was acclaimed as path-breaking. One notable contribution was his discovery of an autonomous sexual reproduction leading to auxospore formation in *Cyclotella meneghiniana*. Another important contribution was with reference to sex differentiation in *Navicula halophila*. He continued his work at the University Botany Laboratory until 1945 when he was selected for a scholarship to study abroad by the Government of India. He proceeded to the United Kingdom and joined the University of Liverpool at Liverpool where he worked under J. McLean Thompson and Margery Knight. His investigations on the brown seaweed *Pelvetia canaliculata* involved his working partly at the Marine Biological Station, Port Erin, Isle of Man. He took his PhD degree from the University of Liverpool. He traveled widely in UK and Europe, meeting and discussing with eminent phycologists of the time Fritsch, Feldmann and Boergesen.

On his return from UK in 1948, he was appointed as a scientist in the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. In that

capacity he worked at various places such as Cochin, Calicut and Madras. During this period he built up his reputation as an expert on marine phytoplankton on which he published a number of papers and wrote two volumes on the Dinophyceae of Indian Seas which form reference works of great importance.

For three years from 1961 to 1964 his services were lent to the Central Rice



Research Institute at Cuttack to organize work on the use of nitrogen-fixing blue green algae in nitrogen-deficient paddy field soils. With characteristic thoroughness, he went about processing blue green algae to be used in rice cultivation and showed tangible results. He was a pioneer in this field. Later he returned to the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute at Cochin where he was Head of the Marine Biology and Oceanography Division until 1971 when he opted for voluntary retirement from service, so that he could attend to his other interests.

Subrahmanyam was a pioneer in phytoplankton studies of the Indian seas and was the first to draw attention to the high

fertility of the Arabian sea adjoining the west coast of India. He elucidated many problems of interest to fisheries. He published more than fifty papers covering a wide field in marine fisheries studies and has authored two volumes on the Dinophyceae of the Indian shores. These, as well as his paper, 'A systematic account of the marine plankton diatoms of the Madras coast' published in the *Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Sciences*, 1946, are still standard references for workers on the marine phytoplankton of the Indian seas.

Subrahmanyam established two new genera, *Hornellia* with *H. marina* as the type species and *Protoeuglena* with *P. noctilucae* as the type and gave an account of their life history. *Hornellia* caused mortality among marine organisms of the coast of Malabar. Both *Hornellia* and *Protoeuglena* caused a green discoloration of the sea. Besides these two new genera, Subrahmanyam also described a new species of *Ruttnera*, *R. pringsheimi* (Chrysophyceae).

In 1956, Subrahmanyam was elected a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences. Further honours came to him from institutions in India and abroad.

Subrahmanyam was ailing for more than a year. I remember well my visit with him about a year back. I found him, in spite of his illness, quite alert and bubbling with enthusiasm about phytoplankton studies. I am indebted to Subrahmanyam, who was my mentor during my initiation into algal research and for the many years over which I received kindness, encouragement and support from him.

V. KRISHNAMURTHY

*Krishnamurthy Institute of Algology,
Chennai 600 034, India
e-mail: krishalg@yahoo.com*