

## Narayana Balakrishnan Nair (1927–2010)

Narayana Balakrishnan Nair, one of the most distinguished marine biologists of India, passed away on 21 April 2010. Nair made several important contributions to marine science and had great influence on many others either through his publications or his brilliance in oratory. He was a brilliant researcher, impressive orator, inspiring teacher and an efficient administrator.

Nair was born on 6 July 1927 at Perumbavoor in Kerala. He had an exceptionally distinguished personality and excelled from the beginning of his academic career. He was a first-rank holder in BSc and MA (Zoology), and obtained PhD (Marine Biology) and DSc (Biological Oceanography) degrees from Madras University.

Nair started his academic career as a lecturer in Alagappa College (Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu) and served in various academic institutions. He was a professor in Thiagarajar College (Madurai) and then at the University of Madras. Later he joined the University of Kerala as a reader in oceanography in 1961, where he founded the Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries in 1972. He was Chairman, State Committee on Science, Technology and Environment and Ex-Officio Secretary, Department of Planning and Economic Affairs (Science and Technology), Government of Kerala. Later, he served as Emeritus Scientist, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), New Delhi.

During the period of his dynamic and dedicated leadership, the Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries carried out extensive investigations in the field of systematic ecology, functional morphology, environmental biology, life history and biological studies on fishes, biological and physiological studies on molluscs, diseases of fish and shell fishes, environmental pollution, aquaculture, and control of aquatic weeds. The University Grants Commission (UGC) selected the Department founded by Nair as a centre of excellence in Aquatic Sci-

ences. The Department owes its present stature of the Centre of Advanced Study (CAS) of the UGC to the firm foundation laid by Nair, who nurtured it since its inception.

Nair specialized in littoral ecology, fishery biology, reproductive biology, functional morphology, fish diseases, pollution of aquatic biotopes, and in the conservation and management of living aquatic resources. He published a great



volume of work in national and international journals of repute and authored four books that are well known. Nair was a world authority on the subject of marine boring organisms, having devoted himself to the detailed studies on these pests for 30 years, primarily in India, for two years in Norway and later in Great Britain, West Germany and South America. Nair can be credited with the existing knowledge of these organisms along the Indian coasts. He had collected, identified and described nearly 25 species of these organisms; made detailed investigations into the structure, development, nature of settlement, growth rates, mode and magnitude of destruction, food and feeding cycles, distribution (both vertical and horizontal), interspecific and intraspecific competition and several other aspects of their ecology as well as details of biochemical fluctuations during seasonal cycles. His monographic study on

the marine fouling and wood boring organisms of Western Norway represents yet another important piece of original work. Nair's studies on the succession of marine fouling communities in the Gulf of Cariaco, Caribbean Sea and the shipworms of South America during 1973–75 have also been of great interest to marine biologists.

One of the few scientists whose talents were spotted early in his academic career, Nair was honoured with several fellowships and awards by various scientific organizations and the government. He was awarded the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Prize in 1971 by the CSIR. He was elected as a Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy in 1975 and of the Indian Academy of Sciences in 1977. In 1978, he was chosen as a National Fellow by the UGC in recognition of his outstanding contributions towards teaching and research in the country. The Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship, awarded to individuals of great distinction in India, was conferred upon Nair by the Nehru Memorial Trust in 1982. The President of India bestowed upon Nair the 'Padmasri' in 1984. The Indian National Science Academy presented him the Chandrakala Hora Memorial Medal in 1987. Nair's contributions to the activities of various governmental and non-governmental agencies are noteworthy.

Nair played an instrumental role in developing substantial manpower in the field of aquatic environmental biology and fisheries in the country. His demise has created a void in the aquatic biology community, which will be difficult to fill. Nair is survived by his wife Gomathi Amma, daughter Aparna Krishna Mohan, son Chandra Mohan and a large family of students.

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