

### Pakshirajan Lakshminarasimhan (1959–2020)



Dr. Pakshirajan Lakshminarasimhan, familiar to his colleagues in the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and to other Indian botanical fraternities as Dr. Narasimhan or PLN, and ‘Lakshmi’ for the European researchers, passed away in Pune, unexpectedly in the early hours of 15 July, 2020 due to COVID 19. He is survived by his wife Mrs. Shobana Lakshminarasimhan and daughter Miss Swetha. It was shocking news to all the colleagues, students and friends in India and abroad, to hear about his untimely demise within one year of retiring from active government service. He was liked by everyone due to his charming personality and loving nature.

Dr. Lakshminarasimhan was born on 28 August, 1959 in Pune as the son of Mr. G. Pakshirajan and Mrs. Seethalakshmi Pakshirajan, who were originally from the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. The fourth of seven siblings, he spent his childhood in Pune and did his primary education there as his father was employed with the Controller of Defence Accounts (CDA), Pune. Consequent

to his father’s transfer, the family moved to Madras (Chennai), where he completed schooling and joined the famous Loyola College and completed his B.Sc. in Botany in 1980. The same year he joined the University of Pune for a Master degree and after completing the M.Sc. (Botany), he joined the Botanical Survey of India, Western Circle (now Western Regional Centre), Pune in 1982 as a Research Scholar under the guidance of Dr. B.D. Sharma, Deputy Director. He worked on the flora of Nasik District, Maharashtra, and this led to an award of Ph.D. by the University of Pune in 1987. His thesis was later published as a book, *Flora of Nasik District*, in 1991. He joined the regular service of the Botanical Survey of India in 1989 as a Botanist at the Andaman and Nicobar Circle, Port Blair and subsequently as Scientist ‘B’. He contributed much to the ‘Flora of Andaman and Nicobar Islands’ by preparing manuscripts of many plant families.

In 1993, Lakshminarasimhan was transferred to the Western Circle of BSI, Pune. There he started working on the Flora of Maharashtra and later took the lead to publish it in three volumes. For the volume of Monocotyledons, he himself prepared the manuscripts of all the 34 families comprising 947 taxa. He also took up projects on floristic diversity of protected areas by engaging talented research scholars. This included the National Park and Rajiv Gandhi (Nagarhole) National Park in Karnataka, Bhagwan Mahavir (Molem) National Park in Goa, and Gugamal National Park in Maharashtra. He also shouldered many administrative responsibilities at BSI, Pune.

Dr. Lakshminarasimhan also served as Indian Botanical Liaison Officer (IBLO) at Kew. As an IBLO he rendered excellent service to Indian botanists in many ways. Subsequently he was posted at the Central National Herbarium (CNH), Howrah and continued his work on the Flora of India and

Flora of Lakshadweep, and edited the Flora of West Bengal volumes.

He served as Head of Office twice at CNH, improved the research facilities there and under his headship the scientific staff at CAL have taken up several important projects. He was also entrusted with the responsibility as In-Charge of the ENVIS Centre of the Ministry of Environment and Forests on Floral Diversity. He has authored, co-authored, and co-edited 25 books, contributed chapters in 15 books and published about 155 research papers along with his research students and colleagues. He successfully guided seven students to their Ph.D. and described 28 new taxa along with his colleagues and students. Also contributed family accounts in different floras, such as Flora of Maharashtra, Flora of Karnataka and Flora of West Bengal. Some of his contributions are yet to be published. For instance different volumes of the Flora of India, Flora of Karnataka, Flora of West Bengal, Flora of Bihar and Flora of Jharkhand. Some of the important books authored, co-authored, or co-edited by Lakshminarasimhan are *Flora of Nasik District*, *Flora of Maharashtra* (3 volumes), *Endemic Plants of Maharashtra State*, *Endemic Vascular Plants of India*, *Flora of West Bengal Volumes 2, 3 and 4*, *Flora of Karnataka Volume 3*, *Flora of India Volume 23*, *Flora of Bhagwan Mahavir (Molem) National Park and Adjoinings, Goa*, *Flora of Rajiv Gandhi National Park, Karnataka*, and *Flora of Anshi National Park, Western Ghats, Karnataka*.

Dr. Lakshminarasimhan joined as Head of Office at BSI, Western Regional Centre, Pune in 2015 and continued there until his retirement in 2019. At Pune he was busy with editing of the *Flora of Karnataka Volume 3 (Monocotyledons)* and *Flora of India* volumes. He continued research activities even after retirement particularly in editing the *Flora of India Volume 20* and *Flora of Lakshadweep Islands*.

He had a long association with Dr. K.N. Gandhi (Senior Nomenclatural Registrar, Harvard University) and with him he organized nomenclature courses in different regions of India. Besides, he took the initiative to disseminate the expertise of researchers



Valedictory of the First Botanical Nomenclature Course at Kolkata (photo courtesy Dr. K.N. Gandhi).

at BSI by arranging capacity building workshops in plant taxonomy, for students and teachers of universities and colleges.

He was a life member and Fellow of the Indian Association for Angiosperm Taxonomy (IAAT) and the Association for Plant Taxonomy (APT). In recognition of his immense contribution to plant taxonomy, in 2010 he was conferred with the prestigious Prof. V.V. Sivarajan Gold Medal by IAAT and the M.B. Raizada Gold Medal by APT. In 2018, a new species, *Portulaca lakshminarasimhaniana* S.R.Yadav & Dalavi was named in his honour.

In his personal life, Dr. Lakshminarasimhan was highly religious and conservative. His family was always supportive of his professional life. He could dedicate most of his time for research, even at home, because his wife Sobhana, a very good homemaker, didn't bother him much to run the house and to streamline the education and talent of their only daughter, Swetha, a talented Bharatanatyam practitioner.

His untimely demise is a big loss for the researchers and institutions involved in taxonomic research in India, particularly for the BSI. Even now it is difficult to accept the fact that Lakshminarasimhan is no longer with us. He will always be remembered, not only by the botanical fraternity for his dedication and contributions he made in Indian plant taxonomy, but by all those who know him personally, because he was a fine human being.

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## Prasanta Kumar Mukherjee (1943–2020)



Prof. Prasanta Kumar Mukherjee, ‘The Man of Umbelliferae’ was born at Mankar in Burdwan district of West Bengal, India in 1943. He obtained his M.Sc. degree from the Department of Botany, University of Calcutta in 1964. Subsequently, he joined the Botanical Survey of India in 1965, where he was inducted as a member of the Joint Scientific Expedition to the Great Nicobar Island, organized by the Government of India in 1966. During his service there, he was trained in field botany, herbarium techniques and acquainted with taxonomic literature. In 1967, he joined the Department of Botany, University of Calcutta as Keeper of the Herbarium (CUH). Subsequently, he was appointed as a Lecturer of Botany at Burdwan University in 1974 and served there for little over four years. Prof. Mukherjee returned to the University of Calcutta in 1979, where he served as a Lecturer, Reader, Professor and finally as the Head of the Department of Botany and the Chairman of the Post Graduate Board of Studies in Botany. Prof. Mukherjee was appointed as an Emeritus Scientist at the BSI after his retirement from the University. As a teacher, he taught

courses on taxonomy, including principles, history, classification, nomenclature, bio-systematics and plant geography, both as a general and as a special paper. It is worth mentioning that the special paper ‘Taxonomy of Angiosperms’ was introduced in the curriculum of the department during his time.

Prof. Mukherjee obtained his Ph.D. degree for the revision of Umbelliferae of India under the guidance of Dr. S.K. Mukherjee. Later, he collaborated with some of the authorities on Umbelliferae, notably Prof. Lincoln Constance (Berkeley), Prof. V.H. Heywood (Reading), Prof. M.G. Pimenov (Moscow), and Dr. Ida Mandenova (Tbilisi). His expertise on the umbellifers is well-recognized. His revision “Umbelliferae (Apiaceae) of India” with Prof. Constance as the co-author was published by the American Institute of Indian Studies and Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd. in 1993. As a recognition to his research on Umbelliferae, he received an invitation by the Department of Botany, University of California, Berkeley, for a visit and lecture; the INSA-USSR Academy of Sciences Exchange Award to visit institutions in USSR (1986); and grants from the British Council Division in India to visit labs in the UK. He then, conducted research on the carpology and leaf architecture of some members of Umbelliferae including SEM studies through some of his students. He discovered five new genera of Umbelliferae, all are endemic to India, which resulted in several nomenclatural alterations.

Other areas, where Prof. Mukherjee extended his research were: *Floristics* (Great Nicobar Island; Singhbhum in Jharkhand, and Keonjhar in Odisha); *Revisions* (Campanulaceae, Lobeliaceae, Piperaceae, and Ventilaginae of Rhamnaceae); *Remote Sensing* (Serpentine Vegetation, Andaman); *Geobotany* (Serpentines of Andaman,

and Phosphate mines, Singhbhum); *Climbers* (North Andaman, and tropical forests of India); *Anatomy* (Climbers); *Micro-morphology including SEM* (Campanulaceae and Lobeliaceae); *Matching of sexes in dioecious plants* (*Piper* species); *Wetlands* (West Bengal); and *Ecology and reclamation of industrial wastelands* (Dhanbad). He successfully guided 16 students to their Ph.D. degree. He published about 80 papers in peer-reviewed national and international

journals and chapters in edited books, including the book, *Umbelliferae (Apiaceae) of India*. Prof. Mukherjee had also visited many herbaria in Europe and America. [source: History of Botany-in the most premier University in India. Department of Botany, University of Calcutta, 2015].

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