

Prof. Dr. Indira Kalyanasundaram (1939-2021)

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Figure 1. Prof. Dr. Indira Kalyanasundaram taking part of previous “ICSEM” meetings along with colleagues and friends. Images from Myriam de Haan and Renato Cainelli.

Indira Kalyanasundaram (born: Indira Pattada, Fig. 1) passed away on April 4, 2021, just short of her eighty-second birthday. Indira was a remarkable woman, distinguished scientist, beloved family member and dear friend to whom we want to bring tribute.

Many of us, members of the small but vibrant community of myxomycetologists, came to know Indira during the International Congresses dedicated to Systematics and Ecology of Myxomycetes (ICSEM), first organized in 1993 in the United Kingdom. One of us (Stephenson) first met her in October of 1990, when she visited me at Fairmont State College in West Virginia as a result of receiving a Fulbright award. Indira spent three months working in the United States, and our collaboration yielded what appears to have been the first large-scale study of myxomycete biogeography ("A comparative biogeographical study of myxomycetes in the mid-Appalachians of eastern North America and two regions of India") published in the *Journal of Biogeography* in 1993. I found Indira to be soft-spoken but a wonderful colleague and a tremendous scientist who greatly expanded my knowledge of myxomycetes. Her visit was one of the highlights of my entire career.

Even after she had retired in 1999 Indira continued attending the ICSEM meetings, and also mycological and botanical congresses. Her presence was rarely left unnoticed, because whether during a presentation of her work or asking questions to a fellow presenter, the points she raised were always thought-provoking. Last time the two of us had occasion to meet her outside her home country of India was in February 2020 during ICSEM 10 in Turrialba, Costa Rica, where she travelled in the good company of her niece Vasantha. Because she was interested in the culture and nature of the host countries where a particular ICSEM was being held, she often extended the voyage with a tour, sometimes through several countries of that particular region. But the travels frequently took their toll; on several occasions she had to recuperate for weeks after she had returned home with infections and/or of semi-starvation, the latter because vegetarian meals are still a rarity in many parts of the world. In any case, she always found it worthwhile to endure this to see her many friends, colleagues, and meeting new people, because all that brought joy to her life.

But life also brings hardships, the untimely passing of her husband, also a Botany professor at the University of Madras, was a devastating event in her life. It must have been challenging for a woman to aspire for an academic career in India in the nineteen sixties. Indira was always very modest about her work and research, which was a pity because even more people would have appreciated her achievements during her lifetime. She never shied away from a challenge and that is apparent from the topics she chose to study, ranging from ethnobotany to mycotoxicology to culturing of myxomycetes. She worked on every project meticulously and demanded as much from herself as from the many students she guided to master and doctoral degrees. She could be strict with anyone who, in her opinion, did not use their abilities to the fullest. However, she was full of compassion for students, colleagues and friends alike who had been overcome by adversity in their lives or work. She especially appreciated a good sense of humour and drew energy from interactions with friends who possessed this quality. For example, the difficult circumstances of a three-month stay in the USSR in 1983 were made more than bearable by the people she met there that were gifted with quoting her "a terrific sense of humour."

After her retirement in 1999 Indira moved back to Virajpet, the village where she grew up, in the south west of India. She had left an extensive botanical and mycological collection including all myxomycetes specimens in the care of her former work place, the Centre for Advanced Studies in Mycology, University of Madras. When she revisited her former lab after a few years, Indira received word that the herbarium was completely destroyed by flooding because it had been stored in a basement.

It saddened her deeply that her collection, including all myxomycete specimens, would never again serve as study material for researchers and students. She also overcame this setback and continued helping students through a number of channels, one example for this is the award for the best doctoral thesis in Botany at the University of Madras she founded and named after her late husband Prof. Dr. R. Kalyanasundaram.

Now she too has passed, she leaves behind the great legacy of her studies and as a person she left a lasting impression that made many of us grateful to have known her. She will be missed, and all we can do is keep her in our memories.