

## PROFESSOR M. O. P. IYENGAR

The passing away of Prof. M. O. P. Iyengar on the 10th of December, 1963, has deprived the world of one of the class of a great galaxy of algologists of this century, for, the last 15 years has witnessed the death of such men as Adolf Pascher, Frederick Boergesen, F. E. Fritsch, Harald Kylin, G. M. Smith, Nils Svedelius, Boye Petersen, Carl Skottsberg, Josef Schiller, Kathleen Drew, to mention some. India lost her foremost algologist and a great Botanist.

Professor Iyengar had been actively engaged in algal research till the last moment. On the 6th he was at the microscope from 8 in the morning till noon, and at lunch he had a stroke and became unconscious from which he never recovered. He died—as he wished it all along—in harness.

Mandayam Osuri Parthasarathy Iyengar was born in the city of Madras on 15th December, 1886. He belonged to an ancient family claiming descent from the followers of Saint Ramanuja, the great Vaishnavite philosopher. The family had migrated from Mysore over a 100 years ago to Madras. His father M. O. Alasingrachariar was a leading attorney in Madras. His uncle, M. O. Parthasarathy Iyengar, and brothers have all occupied leading positions in the public and social life, as judges, teachers, scientists and industrialists. The family is well known for its philanthropy and has endowed munificently to several good causes. He leaves behind 5 sons, a daughter and their families, his wife having pre-deceased him in 1960. Our sympathies go to the bereaved.

Mr. Iyengar matriculated from the Hindu High School and entered the Presidency College, Madras. One amusing incident is worth recording here. In those days, the Heads of various faculties used to hover around the Principal's office enticing boys to take up their special subjects, and it so happened that young Iyengar who had gone to seek admission for Botany found himself in the Philosophy class. Well, after a year Iyengar returned to Botany. He passed out of Presidency College taking his B.A. degree in 1906 and M.A. in 1909, the latter by a thesis on algal studies which branch having attracted him at such an early age.

In 1909, Mr. Iyengar was appointed Curator in the Government Museum, Madras, and in 1911 he entered the Madras Educational Service as Lecturer and Head of the Natural Science Department in the Teachers' College, Madras. With his characteristic zeal and enthusiasm, he organised the Department and gave a new orientation to teaching of Natural Sciences.

In 1920, Mr. Iyengar was appointed Professor of Botany in the Presidency College, his *alma mater*, where, besides teaching he steadily organised research on algae and limnology, probably the first to do so in India in a systematic manner with great farsight, for until then no one appeared to have visualised the practical aspect of these lines of pursuit of knowledge. A number of original contributions followed and Prof. Iyengar attracted attention. He was elected President of the Botanical section of the Indian Science Congress and his presidential address to that body was a thought-provoking review of algal work in India.

Though he had already attained a position, his thirst for knowledge was such that he left for the U.K. in 1930 to work with Prof. F. E. Fritsch in the Queen Mary College. A series of outstanding contributions on algae resulted, studies

on colonial Volvocales of South India, on *Fritschiella* and *Ecballocystopsis* to mention some. Professor Iyengar was awarded the Ph.D. Degree by the University of London and was also elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society.

On return to India, Prof. Iyengar was offered the newly created Chair in Botany in the University of Madras and Director of the University Botany Laboratory. With his indefatigable energy, Professor Iyengar soon established a school of botanical research which won recognition as a leading centre of algological studies of world renown. The contributions from this laboratory by himself (over 30) and by his students have been many and covered all aspects of algal studies—taxonomy, ecology, physiology, cytology and so on. He has described a large number of genera and species and there are several new taxa named after him by his admirers. Space forbids cataloguing all of them here.

Besides being a research worker, Prof. Iyengar was a gifted teacher; his lectures were meticulously prepared for each occasion and marked by clarity of thought and expression. Elsewhere Prof. Iyengar's successor at the University, Prof. T. S. Sadasivan, has drawn attention to the great farsight of Prof. Iyengar in organizing and equipping the laboratory for work on all aspects of botanical research and one which will stand comparison with some of the best in India and abroad. I have myself hardly come across such a well planned and equipped laboratory during my travels in France, Denmark, Sweden and U.K. I must also add that Prof. Iyengar always took such an interest in his students that though almost all of them worked on algae no one of them could be found wanting if he had to switch on to another branch, for, he made sure, before suggesting a problem to a student, that the student possessed a sound knowledge of all methods of botanical research. While his students enjoyed full freedom of work and expression of views, he always guided them into proper channels to take a judicial view and away from making wild statements and always stressed the need for proper presentation of the results.

Even after retirement, Prof. Iyengar was engaged till his end on algal studies and contributed nearly 25 papers during the years 1944 and 1963. At the time of his death he was working on a Monograph on the Volvocales.

Professor Iyengar was one of the Founders of the Indian Botanical Society and was Treasurer, Business Manager and the Editor of their Journal for a number of years. The Society honoured him by bringing out a Commemoration Volume on the occasion of his 60th Birthday which contains contributions from outstanding botanists from several parts of the world and also his students. He was a Foundation Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences and of the National Institute of Sciences, India. Prof. Iyengar was awarded the Birbal Sahni Gold Medal in 1957 and the Sundar Lai Hora Gold Medal in 1960 for his outstanding contributions to algal studies in India. The latter was presented to him at a special meeting of the National Institute of Sciences held at Madras in 1962. In 1954, Prof. Iyengar was elected an Hon. President of the VII International Botanical Congress at Paris; in 1959, the first President of the Phycological Society of India and Hon. Member of the Marine Biological Association of India. In 1963, the International Phycological Society elected him President. It may be stated that it was mainly due to Professor Iyengar's faith and devotion to algology and Dr. M. S. Randhawa's drive, himself an algologist of repute though an administrator, that Algology in India won recognition in the form of an International Symposium held at New Delhi under the auspices of UNESCO and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research in which Professor and his many students took part.

Eminent algologists have borne testimony to Professor Iyengar's erudition and always referred to him with great respect. The writer has had the honour of listening to Prof. Fritsch, at his residence in Cambridge on many occasions, his reference to Prof. Iyengar's quality as a scientist and man and his admiration for him. The great Danish Algologist, F. Boergesen and Prof. Nils Svedelius of Sweden with whom the writer had the privilege of spending some time, used to speak very highly of the qualities of Iyengar. The former always referred to Professor's deep knowledge of the algal flora of India and the fruitful time he had during his tour of India in the twenties to collect algae in the company of Iyengar. Prof. Iyengar was invited by Prof. G. M. Smith to contribute the Chapter on *Chlorophyta* for his *Manual of Phycology* in which Prof. Iyengar's mastery of this group, his pet one, may be seen.

During his collegiate days the Professor was an active sportsman, Captain of the College Football team ; an expert swimmer who won several cups competing with soldiers—he has saved the lives of many including two of his students in 1925 from the treacherous waters of the Pamban at great risk to his life. He was a billiard champion of Madras.

Prof. Iyengar was a man of very noble character and vision and modest; an engaging conversationalist with a fund of humour; free from all petty thoughts and feelings, never harboured ill feelings even against one who did him harm. He has been never known to lose his temper or use harsh language. All who have known him and come into contact with him both here and abroad will sadly miss him.

R. SUBRAHMANYAN.