

P. K. K. Nair (1930–2017)

P. K. K. Nair, the father of Indian palynology and the most renowned palynologist of the 20th century, passed away on 21 January 2017 in Bengaluru. He was a distinguished palynologist, known for his dedication and excellence at work, integrity and humanism. He played a pivotal role in the spread of palynological science in India and contributed in the areas of palynotaxonomy, aeropalynology and pollen allergy, mellittopalynology and bee botany, palaeopalynology, copropalynology, pharmacopalynology and forensic palynology. Under his leadership the new 'principles of palynology and pollen spore morphology' came into existence. Nair is most remembered for enunciation of the 'triphyletic theory of evolution of angiosperms', according to which angiosperms are considered to have evolved along three independent parallel lines – the Ranalian dicots, the Magnolian dicots and the monocots, based on pollen apertural condition. In 2009, he was bestowed with the coveted Birbal Sahni Centenary Award.

Nair was born in Changanacheri, Kottayam districts, Kerala on 6 February 1930. He graduated from St. Berchman's College, Changanacheri, topped in post-graduate studies at the Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in 1952 and completed his Ph D in palaeobotany from Lucknow University in 1958 under the joint guidance of Gunnar Erdtman (Swedish pioneer palynologist) and R. N. Lakhanpal (renowned Indian palaeobotanist). Nair, then dedicated himself to the reinvigoration of pollen morphological studies and their utility in various spheres of science. Commencing from 1958, his professional career spread over 32 years at the National Botanical

Research Institute, Lucknow. Nair worked on palynological aspects, planning and organization, environmental sciences, plant morphology, aerobiology and economic botany covering the fields of botany, agriculture, eco-development, geology and plant evolution, including pollen biology and plant systematics which earned him recognition, till his



superannuation in 1990. He was the Founder Chairman of the Kaul Science Foundation in Lucknow. In 1994, Nair moved to Thiruvananthapuram, where he laid the foundation of the Environmental Resource Research Centre and continued working as its Founder Director and Chairman till May 2016.

Nair was an embodiment of gentleness combined with immense scientific knowledge. During his active days, he modified the concept of palynology in light of reproductive biology of angiospermous flower, where the gametophytic phase is represented by pollen and its ontogeny till pollination. He also

developed the concept of National pollen bank and pioneered the applications of palynological science in agriculture, medicine and aerobiology, palaeopalynology and climate change, and in solving taxonomic complexities. He contributed in the development of apicultural industry as a boon for agriculture, through enhanced crop and fruit yield aided by bee pollination through apiculture, and in tracing the vegetational history of various geographical units. Under his leadership, the International Federation of Palynological Science was formed in 1968, and Nair served as its first Vice President. Concrete proposal for a National School of Palynological Science by Nair led to the establishment of the first independent academic school of palynological sciences in the world.

Nair's recent investigations on pollen morphology of *Cocos nucifera* and *Oryza* spp. revealed that pollen morphological adaptations are an outcome of environmental conditions. After his superannuation, Nair worked on 30 research projects, during his tenure at the Environmental Resources Research Centre, Thiruvananthapuram. His passion for palynology continued till the very end. Nair will always be remembered as a stalwart of palynological sciences. His colleagues and friends fondly remember him as a simple, understanding and humble person who disliked public attention.

ARTI GARG

*Botanical Survey of India,
Central Regional Centre,
10, Chatham Lines,
Allahabad 211 002, India
e-mail: kad_arti396@yahoo.com*