

Obituary Pothur Sreenivasulu (1950–2020)

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Plant virology lost an outstanding scientist and a teacher with the passing away of Prof. Pothur Sreenivasulu (from now referred to as Sreenivasulu) on August 19, 2020 in Bangalore, India. We lost a mentor and a most trustworthy friend. Sreenivasulu was known for his pioneering contributions to the characterization of viruses infecting groundnut (peanut), sugarcane, sorghum, rice, banana, pigeonpea and aroid plants; developing tools for their diagnosis based on molecular and serological properties; and establishment of the Virology Department at Sri Venkateswara University (SVU), Tirupati, India. The first three co-authors of this contribution were his students.

Sreenivasulu was born on June 1, 1950. He was a brilliant student throughout his college education, as evidenced by the highest ranks he obtained. He was awarded Konri Venkatagiri and Srimathi Ganjam Venkata Ramanaiah memorial prizes for obtaining the first rank in his M.Sc. degree (1971–1973). He earned a Ph.D degree in plant virology in 1978 from SVU.

Sreenivasulu spent his entire career at SVU. He was appointed as a lecturer in the Department of Botany in 1979. Subsequently, sustained efforts by him and Prof. M. V. Nayudu resulted in the establishment of the Department of Virology, the first of its kind in India, in 1987. Sreenivasulu became Head of the Department of Virology in 1990. He was the founding coordinator for M.Sc. courses in Biotechnology (1995–1996) and Microbiology (2000–2005) at SVU. He held such important positions at SVU as Chairman of the Board of Studies of the Virology Department and Vice-Principal and Principal of the College of Biological and Earth Sciences. Sreenivasulu was mainly responsible for bringing international recognition to the Virology Department. During his tenure as Principal, he introduced many academic refinements for the welfare of students as well as faculty. He was invited by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to participate in all the international meetings connected with virus research. He was one of the main resource persons selected to participate in technology transfer courses organized by ICRISAT. The laboratory manuals prepared by him for the short-term training courses funded by the University Grants Commission (India) and the Department of Biotechnology (India) are well received by plant virologists from all over India. Sreenivasulu spent eighteen months as a Visiting Scientist (1987–1988) in Dr. J.W. Demski's laboratory at the University of Georgia (UG) in Griffin, GA, USA.

His notable achievements were identification of peanut bud necrosis virus as a distinct tospovirus, assessment of the economic importance and distribution of peanut stripe potyvirus, and characterization of numerous viruses infecting economically important crops, including rice tungro virus complex, peanut green mosaic potyvirus, peanut chlorotic

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leaf streak caulimovirus, sugarcane streak mosaic poacevirus, cucumber mosaic cucumovirus, cowpea mild mottle carlavirus, maize stripe tenuivirus, banana bract mosaic potyvirus, pigeonpea sterility mosaic emaravirus, and nucleorhabdovirus associated with stripe and mosaic diseases of sorghum. He was instrumental in developing cost-effective and reliable techniques for virus detection and transferring the technologies to numerous researchers in India. Indeed, his research laid the foundation for subsequent characterization of economically important groundnut viruses by scientists at ICRISAT. Sreenivasulu's research findings and the diagnostic tools he developed enabled numerous scientists to conduct surveys for viruses and to understand their epidemiology and opened opportunities to devise management strategies for viral diseases. The facilities offered at SVU were not adequate. To accomplish his goals, Sreenivasulu established very fruitful collaborations with ICRISAT, the Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc) in Bangalore, Maharashtra Hybrid Seed Company in Jalna, the University of Delhi-South Campus, and advanced virus laboratories in the USA, the UK, and Belgium.

Sreenivasulu supervised numerous post-graduate and Ph.D students. The guidance he provided and the opportunities he gave to investigate challenging problems helped his students to establish very successful careers in India and abroad. He was held in high esteem by renowned scientists,

including Drs. J. W. Demski (UG), C. W. Kuhn (UG), M. V. Nayudu (SVU), H. S. Savithri (IISc), and G. Padmanabhan (IISc). Sreenivasulu was a modest, kind-hearted, and very fair person. His impeccable integrity and commitment to strive for excellence was second to none. Sreenivasulu published over 120 research articles in many reputed journals, and he contributed to book chapters and to a textbook, "Plant Viruses", written by Prof. M. V. Nayudu and published by Tata McGraw Hill in 2006. In fact, he was a role model and showed clearly how hard work, commitment and integrity can lead to the establishment of a successful career for scientists working in developing countries.

Sreenivasulu is survived by his wife Hyma Devi, a daughter, Hima Bindu, a son, Kodanda Pani, and four grandchildren. His entire family ably supported him in his career. Like all four of us, all of Sreenivasulu's students, colleagues, and collaborators have fond memories of their time spent with him.

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