



Professor S. Crispin Devadas 1932-2017

Professor S. Crispin Devadas M.Sc., M.S., Ph.D. as I know was a humble person, very systematic in his works, always punctual, expecting 100% perfection in all works assigned to us. His way of administration was exemplary, never failed to encourage talent among both staff and students in their academic as well as extracurricular activities. People who are familiar with Prof. Crispin Devadas can easily remember his penetrating eyes, wearing a bigger than normal pair of bi-focal spectacle with thick black frame, partly covering clean shaved face, with occasional smiling and neatly tucked well ironed shirt with half sleeves. He used to come in his green Bajaj scooter .

He was born as the eldest of three children for Mrs. and Mr. Das on 11th June, 1932 at Neyoor, situated about 20 km west of Nagercoil. His father was a Pastor in the church at Neyoor.

He spent much of his childhood and school at Neyoor. He was also belonging to one of the last few batches of 'intermediate class'

He got admitted to a 2 year UG Botany course and cleared with I class and also ranked first in the University in 1953 at University College, Trivandrum, Kerala (functioning from 1834 onwards).

He completed his PG M.Sc. Botany in 1955 in the same college and secured First rank in the University with aII Class. He is very good in making print like drawings drawn using a variety of pencils which were available during those days and his M.Sc. record note book is still available in the department for reference. This drawing skill was encouraged by his colleagues in those days that ultimately ended in publishing 'Campus flora' for MCC.

Professor Crispin Devadas joined MCC in August, 1955 as Demonstrator and became Lecturer. just before the Department was upgraded as Post-graduate Department with the introduction of M.Sc. Botany in 1959.

Professor Devadas met Ms. Mary Sahayam in MCC and married her in June, 1962.

He got admitted to MS program at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA, as Hazel Foundation Scholar in 1965. He continued research in the University of Michigan under the guidance of a famous Paleobotanist of North America, Professor Charles Beck and received his Ph.D. in Plant Anatomy in 1970. When Charles Beck published a book in 2005 and again in 2009, included Prof. CD's name in third position in the list of his Ph.D. students in the dedication page.

Professor Crispin Devadas came back to MCC in June, 1971 and took up the Headship of the Department of Botany and continued as Head until his retirement in 1991. The first thing he did after took over as Head was separating I and II M.Sc. Labs which were till then functioning in the same room and put in two adjoining rooms. He has also converted another room in to a dark room and used it for printing of B/W photographs.

He was also given the responsibility as warden of St. Thomas Hall for 5 years from 1973-74 to 1977-78 when Dr. Bennet Albert was heading the college as Principal. Professor Crispin Devadas was responsible for building the present Botany building with the help of a generous German grant from EZE- abbreviation of a German Association- meaning "Protestant Association of Cooperation in Development" received by the college during the academic year 1977-78. Professor CD worked hard to convince the authorities to have this fund allocated to construct a new building for the Botany Department which was then functioning in the rooms of science block where the Department of Statistics is functioning now. He made his colleagues to draw the basic plan which has to be modified several times until he was convinced on each and every minute detail to the level of even the location of electrical points and diagrams of furniture, etc. It is his idea executed by his colleagues which has resulted in a complete building with spacious labs, class rooms, Gallery and others. The design approved by him is now serving not only to house Botany Department but also other units of the college such as School of Continuing Education and SFS Department of Microbiology.

However during the completion of the building, Professor CD has gone to Nigeria on a teaching assignment (from 1982-1984) and shifting of things from Science Block to the present building was done in 1983 in his absence.

Professor Crispin Devadas retired in 1991 after 36 years of service in the department in which he was Heading the department for 20 years. Most of the lecturers appointed to teach in the department were his own students.

The college wanted him to be in charge of Examinations and appointed as Co-ordinator of Examinations which he did for three years from 1991 to 1994.

Prof. Crispin Devadas was a wonderful person, well read and efficient. Loving husband to his wife and caring father to his two sons. In 1994 he moved to USA with his wife and two sons.

In USA, he was initially teaching in a University and later has taken up teaching UG students at Oakton Community College, Des Plaines, Illinois. Thus he was literally teaching until his last breath on 17th September, 2017 at Chicago.

Prof. K. Mani, who has retired as Associate Professor from Government Arts College, Nandanam was the first Part time M.Phil. student of Prof. CD in 1977 followed by Prof.

Kingston as full time M.Phil. student, who has retired from Scott Christian College, Nagercoil.

Of the two candidates guided for their Ph.D., Dr.A.Balasubramanian has retired as Head of the Department of Botany, Pachaiyappa's college and Dr.P.Brindha, who is working at Sastra University, Thanjavur as Associate Dean and Co-ordinator, Centre for Advanced Research in Indian System of Medicine. The Ph.D. *viva voce* examination of Dr.Brindha was the first in Botany in our college.

Professor Crispin Devadas used to conduct Plant Anatomy practical classes in a unique way. The concerned junior member of the faculty has to take sections and draw the diagrams on the board using colour chalks the previous day. During the practical class he used to describe the anatomy of plant parts by looking in to the microscope and make students also to look in to the microscope and understand the structure layer by layer. The other two members in the practical class should go around and help students to observe the exact layers being described by Professor Crispin Devadas.

Dr.CD, as affectionately called used to encourage students to go for research after completing their M.Sc. and helped faculty members to avail FIP to complete their Ph.D. or to do it on part time. At the time of his retirement in 1990, there were 8 Ph.D.s including him in the department.

On 14th September, 2011, the PG Seminar Club of Department of Botany organized a felicitation function for Professor Crispin Devadas as part of the celebrations of completion of 75 years of Botany Department and 80th year of birth of Professor Crispin Devadas. Video clippings of the proceedings of this function are available in 'YOUTUBE'.

Professor C.D. visited our department on 15th May, 2012, just a month before his 80th Birth day. On 14th May, 2012 a few of us were fortunate to meet him and spent more than an hour at a famous hotel near Ashok Pillar. He was eagerly enquired about the recent developments in the college and in the department of Botany. At that time he promised to visit the department the next day, 15th May and we were thrilled to receive him at the department an hour before the scheduled time and wished to leave the department as early as possible to get ready for his departure to USA on 16th May. In the department he came to the first floor and walked along the corridor with a lot of thinking about the days he spent in his room, Lab no. 4 and in the department.

When he entered the algal culture chamber he expressed his happiness and told that he was satisfied with the development that took place in the Botany department over the years. When he was spending some time in another lab of species recovery project, he congratulated everyone for all the developments that happened in the department. Before leaving the department, he planted a sapling of '*Podocarpus*', a plant belonging to Gymnosperms. Whenever I pass lab number 4 of the botany department, I always remember him. The building of the botany department built on his 50th year of birth with all his planning and guidance and the sapling that he planted during the beginning of his 80th year of birth will remain forever in Madras Christian College in memory of his service to the students of

Botany Department and Madras Christian College century after century. Sir, the days I worked under your headship in Botany department, the trust you had on me while you served here as co-ordinator of examinations, the moments I spent with you when you were here in Chennai and in the department on 14th and 15th May, 2012 respectively and this moment on 11th October, 2017, the 85th year of your birth in which I had been given an opportunity to share my experience with everyone here, are moments that will remain in my heart for ever. May God shower His blessings to strengthen the hearts of Ms. Sahaya Mary, their sons and their children to overcome this great irreversible loss.

Dr.M.Baluswami

Note:

Prepared for a presentation during the service of thanksgiving for the life and service of Dr. Crispin Devadas on Wednesday, 11th October, 2017 at 12.30 pm in the Anderson Hall, Madras Christian College, Chennai-6003. For any correction/omission/update please mail to balumcc@gmail.com