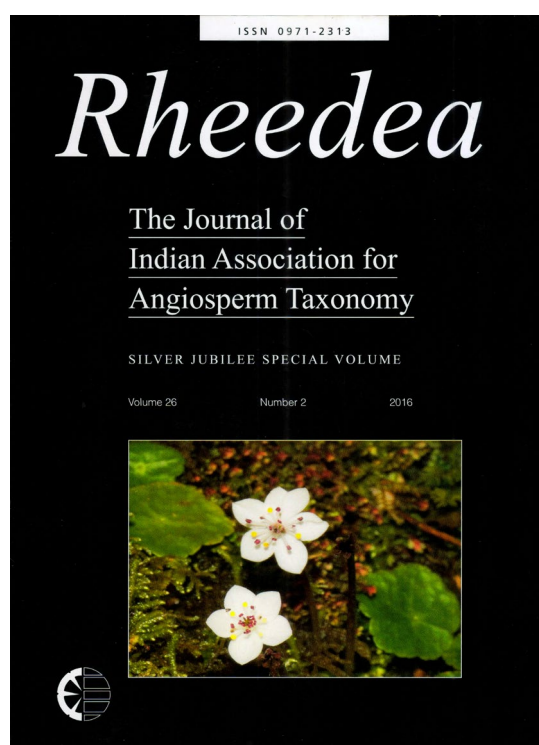




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(27 January 1932–9 December 2016)

K.N. Nair



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Obituary

Madhavan Parameswaran Nayar (27 January 1932–9 December 2016)



Dr. Madhavan Parameswaran Nayar who was popularly known as M.P. Nayar among the plant science fraternity, passed away on the morning of 9th December 2016 at his residence in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. He was 84 and survived by his wife Mrs. Lakshmi Nayar, daughter Mrs. Sandhya Ganapathy, son-in-law Mr. M.A. Ganapathy, IPS, and grandson Mr. Nikhil. He was not keeping well in the last few months after the stroke he had in July this year. By his sad demise Indian botany lost an outstanding taxonomist of international repute. Dr. Nayar will be greatly remembered for his remarkable contributions that enriched the plant taxonomy, phytogeography and conservation biology in India and Southeast Asia through his dedicated research nearly for six decades.

Dr. M.P. Nayar was born on 27th January 1932 at Nagercoil in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore, now part of Tamil Nadu. He had his primary and intermediate education at his hometown and later joined the prestigious University College at Thiruvananthapuram to pursue his graduate and postgraduate studies. He was a bright student and secured his B.Sc. degree in Botany and Chemistry (as main subjects) in 1951 and M.Sc. in Botany in 1955 from the University of Kerala, both with a First Class and First Rank.

Since his school days, Dr. Nayar had developed a deep interest in observing plants and associated fauna in the wilderness around his school and hometown. As a student, he used to spend his pocket money for plant explorations. He collected plants even from the inaccessible areas in Agasthyamalai, which is known as a rich haven for many rare and interesting species. His passionate interest in plant science led him to take up an active career of 32 years long in the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), ultimately becoming its director.

Dr. Nayar started his professional career on 20th March 1957 as a Scientific Assistant at the Southern Circle, BSI in Coimbatore. He worked there for 8 to 10 months and initiated the work on Flora of Courtallum. Sooner, within one year in 1958, he was appointed as a Systematic Botanist at BSI, Kolkata. During his early career, Dr. Nayar was fortunate to have the guidance of such eminent professors and mentors, Prof. Narayana Aiyar (then Professor of Botany, University College, Thiruvananthapuram), Prof. P. Maheswari (then Professor of Botany, University of Delhi) and Dr. K. Subramanyam (then Director of Botanical Survey of India). The inspiring interactions with such stalwarts motivated a young and enthusiastic Dr. Nayar to take up phytogeography, phytosociology and plant conservation as active areas of his research. He conducted a detailed study on the vegetation of Kanyakumari during 1954–1956, and the results of this study formed the content of his very first research article, titled 'The vegetation of Kanyakumari, Kanyakumari district' (*Bull. Bot. Surv. India* 1: 122–126. 1959).

In 1961, Dr. Nayar was deputed to work as the Liaison Botanist at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK. For six years, from 1961 to 1967, he zealously worked at the Kew Herbarium, where he had the good fortune to work with great botanists and taxonomists, Dr. John Hutchinson, Sir George Taylor, Dr. C.E. Hubbard, Dr. N.L. Bor, and Dr. R.E. Holttum. The legacy of these dedicated professionals and their contributions to enriching botany, especially systematic botany, had greatly influenced Dr. Nayar's perspectives and his research pursuits. At Kew, he monographed different genera of Melastomataceae for Southeast Asia under the supervision of Dr. G. Taylor, for which he was awarded a Ph.D. degree by the University of London in 1966. He described 3 new genera (*Neodriessenia*, *Pseudodissochaeta* and *Tayloriophyton*), 98 new species and many new varieties of Melastomataceae.

Dr. Nayar returned to India in 1967 and took up the assignment as Keeper of the Central National Herbarium (CAL), Howrah. The rich experience he gained at the Kew Herbarium helped Dr. Nayar to reorganize CAL, both structurally and functionally. In 1977, he took up the post of Deputy Director of BSI at the Western Circle, Pune, and surveyed the plants of northern Western Ghats, especially Mahabaleshwar. In 1979, he again moved to Kolkata to serve as Deputy Director up to 1982, and later as Joint Director from 1982 to 1984, and finally as Director of BSI during 1984–1990. During this period he laid the foundation for the Flora of India series: State Flora and National Flora. He along with his students and colleagues revised the following plant families for the Flora of India: Aceraceae, Pittosporaceae, Papaveraceae, Malvaceae, Bombacaceae, Rutaceae, Lardizabalaceae, Lythraceae and Sabiaceae. He guided 15 students for their Ph.D. degree. As a Director, Dr. Nayar successfully steered the Botanical Survey of India on a growth curve with large number of publications on endangered species, ecology of wetlands, ethnobotanical and geobotanical studies. Besides the Melastomataceae, Dr. Nayar and his colleagues described over 15 novelties in other plant families.

Dr. Nayar authored and published 25 books and about 250 scientific papers. Some of the noteworthy and well-referred books, authored or coauthored/coedited by him, are: *Meaning of Indian Flowering Plant Names* (1985); *Key Works to the Taxonomy of Flowering Plants of India* (1984–1986, 5 volumes); *Network of Botanic Gardens* (1987); *Economic Plants of India* (1989, 2 volumes); *Mangroves in India: Identification Manual* (1989); *Endemic Plants of the*

Indian Region Vol. 1 *Peninsular India* (1986); *The Poppies of Indian Region (Papaveraceae)* (1986); *Red Data Book of Indian Plants* (1988, 1989, 1990, 3 volumes); *Hot Spots of Endemic Plants of India, Nepal and Bhutan* (1996); *Agrobiodiversity hotspots in India: Conservation and Benefit Sharing* (2009, 2 volumes).

After his superannuation on 31st January 1990, Dr. Nayar joined first as Emeritus Scientist of the Botanical Survey of India at the Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI), Thiruvananthapuram. He was nominated to the prestigious Pitamber Pant National Environment Fellow of the Government of India in 1994. After completing the fellowship, he took up the Chair in Taxonomy in the Centre of Excellence scheme at TBGRI from 1997 to 2000. He received the Santapau Gold Medal in Taxonomy, instituted by The Association of Plant Taxonomy in 2005. During 1991–2015, Dr. Nayar also served as the President of the Environmental Resources Research Centre (ERRC), Thiruvananthapuram, where, he and his students and colleagues successfully executed several projects funded by the Government of India, including “Reproductive and conservation biology of Malabar Gamboge”; and “Biodiversity conservation and management of Sasthamkotta Freshwater lake”.

During his official career as representative of the Government of India, Dr. Nayar visited U.S.S.R., China, U.S., UK, the Netherlands, Canada, France and Germany. He was the leader of the Indian team on Plant Working Group at Tuscon (U.S.), Member of the Indian Delegation to IUCN (Madrid) in 1984, Member of the Indian Scientific Delegation to U.S.S.R. (1988), Member of the Indian delegation to the International Botanical Congress at Edinburgh (1984) and at Berlin (1987). He chaired the Indian Subcontinent Plant Specialist Group of Species Survival Commission of IUCN during 1984–1987.

Dr. Nayar was an elected Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy, Indian Botanical Society and Indian Association for Angiosperm Taxonomy. He served as chairman and member of several important national committees, international delegations, governing bodies and research councils of R & D Institutions.

Dr. Nayar was commemorated by botanical community by naming several plants in his honour: Genus: *Nayariophyton* T.K. Paul; and new species such as: *Bothriochloa parameswaranii* Sreek., Malathi & V.J. Nair, *Bridelia nayarii* P. Basu, *Elymus nayarii* Karthik., *Gomphostemma nayarii* A.S. Chauhan, *Hiptage nayarii* R.C. Srivast., *Maesa nayarii* G.S. Giri & S.K. Das, *Oberonia nayarii* R. Ansari & N.P.



Dr. M.P. Nayar inaugurating training programme in plant taxonomy held at Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram

Balacr., *Osbeckia nayarii* G.S. Giri, *Rhododendron nayarii* G.D. Pal, *Saxifraga nayarii* Wadhwa, *Sonerila nayariana* Murug. & V. Balas., *Spiraea nayarii* K.M. Purohit & Panigrahi, *Stixis nayarii* Sundararagh., *Syzygium parameswaranii* M. Mohanan & A.N. Henry, *Utricularia nayarii* Janarth. & A.N. Henry and *Vernonia nayarii* Uniyal.

I was fortunate to have a long association with Dr. Nayar for the last 30 years. My association with him started with my joining the Botanical Survey of India in Kolkata as a research scholar in May 1986 and worked on the Taxonomy of Indian Rutaceae under his supervision. The teacher – student relation of ours grew further when both of us got another chance to work at TBGRI in Thiruvananthapuram during 1992–2001. We maintained regular contacts even after I left TBGRI in July 2001 to take up my present job at the CSIR – National Botanical Research Institute, Lucknow. I met him last at his residence in Febraury 2016 and

we spent hours discussing botany, our families, friends and colleaugues.

Like me, many others who closely knew Dr. Nayar would admire his fine humane qualities. Dr. Nayar was articulate in expressing his scientific ideas, and findings with precision. He was a versatile personality and could discuss of wide ranging topics such as Indian culture, history and science administration in India. To his friends Dr. Nayar has always been trustworthy and helpful, while all his students and colleagues benefited greatly from his staunch support and guidance.

Throughout his eventful botanical career, spanned almost 60 years, Dr. Nayar upheld highest ideals and morale. He will ever be rembered for his marvelous research contributions. May his noble soul rest in peace.

K.N. Nair
NBRI, Lucknow