

OBITUARIES



Dr. Usha Kirtilal Mehta
1940-2006

Dr. Usha Mehta was born on May 5, 1940 in Palanpur, Gujarat, India and soon afterward her family moved to Coimbatore. She passed away on December 20, 2006 in Antwerp, Belgium following cardiac arrest. The world lost an outstanding scientist, a dedicated administrator, and a caring community leader.

Dr. Mehta's early schooling began at St. Mary's High School and Nirmala College, Coimbatore and in 1959 she graduated from the Government Arts College, Coimbatore with her B.Sc. degree in zoology. She earned her Master's degree at the Pachaiyappa College, Madras. Dr. Mehta was then appointed as a Research Assistant at the Agricultural College and Research Institute, Coimbatore (now Tamilnadu Agricultural University, TNAU). While there, she was introduced to nematology by Dr. A. R. Seshadri, an eminent pioneer in the discipline. During 1966-70 she worked at the University of California, Davis for her Ph.D. degree in Nematology under the guidance of Professor D.J. Raski. Her dissertation dealt with the pioneering systematics of the nematode genus *Criconema*.

On her return to Coimbatore, Dr. Mehta was appointed as CSIR Pool Officer at JNAU and subsequently at the Sugarcane Breeding Institute, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, where she developed an outstanding research career and became Head of the Division of Crop Protection (Principal Scientist in charge of Sections of Entomology, Plant Pathology and Nematology). Her scientific work led

to more than 100 publications in both national and international journals. Her significant findings on the biology of an entomopathogenic nematode, *Heterorhabditis indicus*, led to the development of biological control of a serious white grub sugarcane insect pest. Thus, Dr. Mehta played a pivotal role in advancing very useful sugarcane breeding and production methodology involving integrated pest management.

Dr. Mehta worked at the Sugarcane Breeding Institute until her retirement in 2003 and was reappointed as Emeritus Scientist at Bharathiyar University where she continued her teaching and research work until last December. Her distinguished career included notable contributions to nematology research, extension and education as she guided ten Ph.D. students at the Bharathiyar University and the Avinashilingam Deemed University. Dr. Mehta was one of the leaders who established the Afro-Asian Society of Nematology, which honored her in 1994 by appointing her as a Fellow. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research recognized her lifetime accomplishments by awarding her the Outstanding Woman Scientist in Agriculture Award in 1988. She was a member of a number of international scientific societies including the Society for Invertebrate Pathology.

Dr. Mehta earned respect and admiration from her colleagues and friends for her deep and abiding concerns and services in helping many students and poor children in getting a proper education and in making medical facilities available to the poor. She accomplished her public service goals through the Rotary Club of Coimbatore, which she helped to establish and lead as the Charter President in 1990. She also served as Assistant Governor of the District of Rotary and chaired the Women Empowerment Program. In 1998 the Rotary Club of Coimbatore Satellite recognized her enthusiastic and dedicated community work with its Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2006, the Coimbatore Kendra of Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan presented her the prestigious Kulapati K.M. Munshi Award.

D. J. Raski
Emeritus Professor, UC Davis