



### **Dr. C.S. Gopinadha Pillai**

- Designation at retirement : Principal Scientist & Head FEM Division
- Period of service: 1964 - 1996

## **Remembering my Mandapam days**

It is now more than four decades since I stepped into the corridors of CMFR Institute at its erstwhile HQ at Mandapam Camp, as a research scholar of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India. When I look back at my career spanning more than thirty years, I have a nostalgic feeling of my tenure at this narrow strip of land in the midst of Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar. The area was full of thorny bushes, venomous cobras and vipers as well as star tortoises. When I joined in 1964, Dr. Santhappan Jones was the Director. He was affected by polio and both legs were disabled. He moved around on a wheel chair. He was certainly a great visionary and a Karmayogi.

Life at Mandapam Camp at that time was difficult. Food was scarce, transport limited, medical facilities virtually nil, there was no school for children, not to speak of the non-availability of hygienic drinking water. My most unforgettable event at Mandapam Camp was the devastating

cyclone of December 1964 that took a toll of many lives including two of our staff.

Infrastructure for research was limited. Only officers were eligible for departmental vehicle for the field trip. The furniture included a table, a chair and a wooden rack. A fan was a luxury but essential in that hot climate. Sophisticated laboratory equipments were not available. A fish scale, a divider and a lens or binocular microscope satisfied a fishery scientist. A hand rotating calculator was used for processing the essential data. The cracking noise of typewriters often announced their presence.

Despite all these constraints work was worship to us. Absolute calmness prevailed in the campus during office time. Dr. Jones preached and practiced Niskama karma. Most of us work starts at day-break with strip to the field for collection of data or specimens. Our laboratory work often extended up to 9.30 PM. Considerable basic data on fishery biology, taxonomy of living resources, ecology and oceanography was assembled during early sixties and seventies and these information is still the foundation of marine research in this country.

I reckon that the golden moment in my career was when Dr. Jones asked me to convene an International symposium on corals and coral reefs under the auspices of the Marine Biological Association of India, purely because I worked under his guidance on the topic for my doctorate. I was reluctant at first due to my inexperience but he infused courage.

It is my pleasure and privilege to wish many golden moments for the present staff of CMFRI and hope that they will laurels to the country by the excellent work they are doing.