

OBITUARY



Prof. Jyotsna Murthy

1962-2020

I first met Jyotsna Murthy sometime in the year 2001. We were meeting at Bangalore to discuss the possibility of launching an Indian Cleft Society. Krishna Rao my boss took me along. I heard from him that she had just returned after a stint in France and was working at Ramachandra, Chennai. As she sat and conversed she struck me as very glamorous, chic!.

The Indian Society for Cleft lip Palate and Craniofacial Anomalies (ISCLPCA) was born that same year and Jyotsna was a prime mover without any doubt. Much water flew down the Cauvery from Karnataka to TamilNadu in these years and Jyotsna became a great friend and a colleague for whom I developed a great amount of respect and regard. Our career together as Cleft Surgeons, particularly with Smile Train as well as in the ISCLPCA brought us together a number of times in a year and she became a part of my growth in the profession.

From the beginning I noticed that she was a determined woman, used to getting her way around, and someone who didn't mind giving a little push to everyone in the direction she wished us to travel!

The one thing that stuck me was her absolute professional integrity. She was genuine and highlighted her successes as well as discussed her problems without any inhibition. Many a times I disagreed with her , the last time being the Varanasi meeting and she always had a very pleasant smile on her face , as I took her on with my differences and this I believe never came in the way of our friendship.

I got ensnared into the executive committee of the ISCLPCA by yet another charming gentleman, Mukund Thatte at his meeting in Guwahati in 2006. Jyotsna by then had succeeded him as the Secretary of the ISCLPCA and I struggled, with her help, to start and run a journal for the Association. Three years later at Pondicherry she charmed me with a lot of flattery to continue as the Editor. Little did I believe ,even with my experience of the past 3 years, that nobody else wanted this job and our efficient secretary painlessly kept me on.

In all the years I was associated with her, she never gave a damn to the different identities that she and I had. Once she told me, a lot of men find it difficult to deal with her, when I told her “that is because you are the one wearing the pants always”.

Jyotsna was one of the persons instrumental in projecting the cause of cleft children in India and was determined to showcase India and our cleft care community to the world and worked for this tirelessly. Virtually single handedly she tried to get the World cleft congress to India. She failed in her first attempt at Durban and became more determined to win our bid at Brazil in 2009. We worked closely with her in this bid and I remember being asked by her to be the Indian observer, as they counted the votes at this meeting, my heart pounding as I saw the votes piling up and trying to convey to the others that we were through. We had beaten Taiwan and Canada and a few other contenders Dogged Jyotsna had won. The Indian contingent of more than 35 people went out for an Indian meal and had a great time together. Jyotsna was a naturalist and had wanted us to do a trip to the Amazon after this meeting. The 15 of us who joined with her on a 5 day boat cruise on the Amazon will testify to the fact that Jyotsna could bring together disparate men and women and make them have fun.

For the next eight years Jyotsna breathed this meeting day in and out and made a lot of us sweat hard. She asked me to be the Scientific Chair for this meeting and boy, I am glad I agreed. It is a testimony to her organisational skills that this was a world class meeting, still being appreciated by people who came here and spent time at Mahabalipuram. What many people did not know was the amazing level of persistence she had, in making sure that a single paisa was not misspent - Muthu who was the treasurer for this meeting will bear me out - that we ended up with a greatly successful financial event as well. No detail escaped her eye and me and Savitha, who was the Co chair with me had to come up with quick explanations often to avoid a tongue lashing!!! Those were the days.

Tragedy struck a few months before this meeting and she had Breast cancer. I still remember the time she made the call to me and the concern she had for the future of this meeting despite her predicament. She was a true global leader. She was sure that if something happened to her, things would still go on as smoothly as she had planned it. Roopa will be able to add to this story I am sure.

The last time I met her was at Varanasi at the conference. We conversed together as if nothing had happened. She had virtually stopped taking phone calls and I told her that sometimes she should and she agreed. I regret I never called her and heard about her demise today.

Jyotsna above all commanded great respect from everybody who knew her whether they liked her or not. She was the Indian face of Cleft care amongst the world community. It is an understatement to say that we will miss her, but I will say it. She is one of those, who leaves a footprint in the sand of times and her legacy will continue for a long time Jyotsna May your Soul rest in Peace.

Krishnamurthy Bonanthaya

President

ISCLPCA 2020-2021

She had a deep empathy with patients - She made sure she and her colleagues do not make the patient go through anything which we would not like ourselves or those close us would not want to undergo - be it treatment, expenses, waiting or unnessary visits to the hospital. And she had unlimited energy. She would never hesitate to start a emergency case at the end of a long list whenever it was needed.

Dr. Altaf Husain