

IIRA

International Industrial Relations Association



IIRA Broadcast

A Tribute to Prof. Venkata Ratnam

The IIRA Secretariat wishes to inform all our members of the death of Prof. Venkata Ratnam which occurred on 16 April 2010 in India. On behalf of all IIRA members I extend our sincere condolences to the family. Below you will find a tribute, kindly written by Dr. Shyam Sundar, a colleague of Professor Ratnam and member of our Association. A second tribute is by Guiseppe Casale and Siva Sivananthiran, with whom Prof. Ratnam shared the coordination of the IIRA Study Group on "Re-engineering Labour Administration".

Tayo Fashoyin,
IIRA Secretary.

Professor Ratnam was an institution builder in many ways. In the mid-1990s, he, along with Prof. C.P. Thakur founded the Indian Industrial Relations Association, a national member of the IIRA. The most recent of the several activities of the national association was the hosting of the Asian Regional Congress of the IIRA in New Delhi in April 2007. He organized various academic activities and published books on contemporary themes in industrial relations. He served as a member of the Executive Committee of the IIRA. He also served as a Secretary of the Indian Society of Labour Economics for two terms, until 2008. He wrote keynote addresses on various themes in industrial relations for the Annual Conferences of the Society of Labour Economics and encouraged young scholars from various parts of India to write papers. These helped sustain the Society's members' interest in industrial relations.

He collaborated with institutions and academics at various levels. His collaboration with the ILO needs special mention. He collaborated with the staff of the Subregional Office for South Asia of the ILO in New Delhi, and wrote technical manuals, co-edited books and monographs. He was a consultant for the ILO for a number of years. He prepared a *Report on Indian Industrial Relations* for the ILO Taskforce on Industrial Relations, which was an input to the ILO's World Labour Report titled *Industrial Relations, Democracy and Social Stability* published in 1997. He was a highly respected ILO consultant.

Prof. Ratnam collaborated with many academics, notable Prof. Tom Kochan, Prof. Anil Verma, Prof. Saorsh Kuruvilla, et al. Though his academic interests were many, industrial relations was his passion and first love. He wrote a number of books, monographs on various aspects of industrial relations. His text *Industrial Relations*, published by the Oxford University Press, New Delhi, is referred to by students, teachers and researchers in India and abroad for information on industrial relations in India. He edited special issue of the Indian Journal of Labour Economics on the theme, *Globalization and Labour Market and Industrial Relations*. He established with the collaboration of Sage Publishers, the Global Business Review, a refereed Journal.

His most important contributions lay in two areas. Firstly, he recognized the fact that an understanding of IR at the macro level necessarily requires explorations at the levels of industry, sectoral and regional patterns. He made significant contributions to the understanding of the diversities in IR in India. Secondly, he recognized that globalization is irreversible and competitiveness of firms and countries matter in the market economy. In the changed economic environment, he believed that "social dialogue" and "changed attitudes" of the "actors" in industrial relations could only offer productive solutions. It is with these beliefs that he conducted a number of tripartite deliberations on the topical themes. Academics and practitioners of IR are aware of the intensity of polemics inherent in the field. In the highly contested terrain, Prof. Venkata Ratnam commanded respect from all the social partners (trade unions, employers and the government in India). It is a tribute to his academic weight and his non-partisan outlook.

He encouraged young scholars in IR and HRM. I was one of the beneficiaries. I have known him since the mid-1990s and have had the privilege and pleasure of having reviewed some of his major books. In April-May 2007, he

asked me to work on a short joint paper enquiring into the development of benchmarks in the field of labour regulation and investment climate. I pursued the idea that soon I found there was enough material to write a book, which I did. He was gracious enough to give me sole authorship to the book which built on his basic idea and read through the whole manuscript and offered both comments and encouragement. Indeed, he was one of the few who unflinchingly read and appreciated my writings. There can only be a few who could match this act of magnanimity and selfless commitment to the process of intellectual progress! Needless to say, he would have produced a better book than I eventually did! Words fail me to describe the generosity and kindness he had shown me both personally and professionally. I was amazed (like many others who knew him) at his simplicity and marvelled at how lightly he carried himself despite his fantastic achievements.

Many described him as a "good soul" and considered him as a respectable academic. He was a gentleman to the core and his Brahmanisue qualities endeared him to many. This combination of praise alone is a tribute to him!

When I informed my 86 year old mother of his sudden demise, she philosophized that God takes into His fold "good" people soon. This was comforting to hear.

K.R. Shyam Sundar,
India.

On 16th April 2010, the IIRA Study Group on "Re-engineering Labour Administration" lost one of its founder members. The late Prof. C.S. Venkata Ratnam led the group discussion at the 15th IIRA World Congress in Sydney in August 2009. He was one of the most respected authorities on industrial relations and labour administration in India. From his early works on industrial relations dynamics in ports in India and Sri Lanka (1970s), his professional trajectory led him to continue his work at the International Management Institute in New Delhi where he became the IMI Director. At the Institute, he was very active. He published over 100 books and articles with several of them with reference to ILO core principles and rights.

Venkat is fondly remembered by his friends and colleagues for his personal engagement in the development of modern industrial relations in India, especially on collective bargaining, labour dispute settlement and worker participation. His commitment to industrial relations led him to establish the Indian chapter of the IIRA, which is one of the most active. In 2007, Giuseppe - as the then IIRA Secretary - had the privilege of working closely with him in organizing the 6th IIRA Asian Regional Congress, which will be remembered by many as one of the most successful IIRA events. We have also had an opportunity to work closely with him in a joint publication entitled: "Re-engineering Labour Administration to Promote Decent Work", published by the ILO in 2006.

In the highly contested terrain of labour issues in India, Prof. Venkata Ratnam commanded respect from all the social partners and the government. Indeed this is a tribute to his academic weight and to his non-partisan outlook. Truly, we have lost a son who was loved by all who knew him in the labour fraternity. In the next IIRA Study Group meeting on Labour Administration, scheduled in conjunction with the 7th IIRA Asian Congress (Indonesia, 20-23 September 2010), we will pay a special tribute to his works.

May His Soul Rest in Peace.

G. Casale, A. Sivananthiran,
IIRA Study Group on Labour Administration.

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