

Professor A. Vaidyanathan: MIDS Condolence Resolution

June 17, 2020, MIDS, Chennai

It is with a profound sense of grief and anguish that the faculty, staff and students of the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) record the passing of Professor A. Vaidyanathan (1931–2020). As an accomplished economist, policy maker and teacher, ‘Vaidy’ as he was fondly referred to by his friends and peers, was active until almost the very end of his long and distinguished career. Though he was associated with many institutions, MIDS takes pride that Professor Vaidyanathan’s longest association was with MIDS. It would be no exaggeration to say that he was one of the preeminent scholars of MIDS who gave direction to the institute and contributed to its international reputation. Vaidyanathan joined MIDS in 1984 at the invitation of its founder Malcolm S. Adiseshiah, and was associated with it in various capacities: Professor, Emeritus Professor and Director; member of the Board of the Governing Council and Board of Trustees. His association with MIDS continued until the very end.

Professor Vaidyanathan, hailing from a village near Salem, was born in Madur near Mysore. He studied B.Com in Loyola College, Chennai before acquiring his Ph.D. from Cornell University, U.S.A. He began his career at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), Delhi (1956–1962). Following this, for the next ten years, he was with the Perspective Planning Division of the then Union Planning Commission. This was followed by a three-year stint at the World Bank. Later he was a professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum for eight years until 1984.

Professor Vaidyanathan’s early research and policy advice focused on poverty, employment and agricultural growth. In later years he did extensive work on bovine economy. Many scholars drew on this work in recent charged debates on India’s cattle. However, it was his work on water management and irrigation that garnered widest attention and his intervention in the debate on the interlinking of rivers is much valued for its deep insights.

Professor Vaidyanathan had a deep knowledge about data, and he constantly grappled with such data to gain an understanding of deeper and longer-term economic processes.

As a scholar who was deeply interested in the value of scholarship for policymaking, Professor Vaidyanathan did not hesitate to take part in various high-level committees and contribute despite the fact that such wisdom was not always welcomed. Concerned with the state of social science research in the country he wrote a perspicacious report on the functioning of the ICSSR.

In a fitting swansong, Professor Vaidyanathan traced his intellectual journey in the MIDS Founder’s Day Lecture, 2018.

The faculty, staff and students of MIDS cherish Prof. Vaidyanathan’s contribution to the world of scholarship in general and to the institution in particular, and convey their profound sense of loss to his family – his wife, Mrs Shanta Vaidyanathan, daughters, Prof. Rama Baru and Radhika Vaidyanathan, brother, A. Arjunan, and son-in-law, Sanjaya Baru.