



Madasamy Subbiah Thirumalai

April 9, 1940 - June 18, 2025

Dr. M.S. Thirumalai, age 85, passed away peacefully at his daughter's home in Savage, MN, on June 18, 2025.

Thirumalai was a lifelong scholar and beloved husband, father, grandfather, professor, and friend. He was a devout Christian and will be remembered for his intellect, generosity, and unwavering commitment to education. He was born on Malayan Street in Tenkasi, India, on April 9, 1940. After graduating from IC Eswaran Pillai Board High School in 1957, he pursued higher education with a passion, studying at Hindu College, Tirunelveli where he completed his BA in Tamil without owning a pair of shoes or pants. He then went to Annamalai University and completed his Master's in Linguistics with a first rank. He submitted his PhD thesis in Calcutta University under Professor Sukumar Sen and received his Phd in 1969.

He was in Calcutta when a friend encouraged him to think about getting married. He knew he wanted a woman who was educated, and who could stand up for herself. He found exactly what he was looking for in his soon to be wife, Swarna. Upon meeting her father, they spoke deeply about education and politics - the respect was mutual. The one condition for marriage was that there would be no dowry and that Thirumalai would convert to Christianity. This began his journey as a lifelong committed Christian. Swarna and Thirumalai married in 1966 and moved to Calcutta, India where he worked as

research scholar in the Calcutta Censes offices. He was selected for a scholarship to study in the University of Hawai'i in 1967. He participated in the East West Center Program at the University of Hawai'i and completed his second Master's degree in Linguistics in 1969. Thirumalai loved his time in Hawai'i - particularly the \$1 KFC meal boxes of chicken and rice. Swarna joined him there in 1968. They returned to India and he started work as a Research Officer in the Central Institute of Indian Languages working on the tribal languages of the north eastern states/territories of India. They moved to Mysore, India in 1970 and remained there until he took early retirement as Professor cum Deputy Director of the Central Institute for Indian Languages in 1992. His son was born in 1967 and his daughter was born in 1970. The family lived in the Gangothri Mysore University Quarters until they built their own house in Kuvempunagara, Mysore in 1983.

Swarna and Thirumalai moved to Minnesota, USA in 1991 to study and work at the Bethany College of Missions where he stayed until he retired as Dean of Academic Affairs in 2010. His scholarly contributions include numerous essays, articles, books, and the open access academic journal "Language in India" which focuses on publishing the works of South Asian scholars. Thirumalai was a lifelong learner and took classes at Hennepin Technical and Community College to learn computer programming to set up the Language in India website in 2000. A passionate advocate for education, Swarna and Thirumalai founded St. John's English Medium Higher Secondary School near Malayan street, where he grew up, in 1996. His nephews (Valli and Selvaraj) and nieces (Shanthi and Amudha) have been extremely helpful with the management of the school. It was a dream for Thirumalai to establish a school for poor children near the community where he was raised.

In retirement, Thirumalai's great passions were Language in India, St. John's School, and his grandchildren. He also enjoyed traveling with his family - including returning to Hawai'i twice, numerous trips to India, visiting many

national parks in the USA, a European river cruise with Swarna, and a long-awaited trip to China and Hong Kong with Swarna, his daughter, and granddaughter. He loved eating mixture, peanuts, and hamburgers (plain) and limited quantities of Tenkasi halwa.

He was preceded in death by his father (T.M. Subbaiah), his mother (Valliammal), his brother and nine sisters. He is survived by his wife, Swarna, his two children: son, John Pandian (and children, daughters Ashley and Hope, and sons Joshua (Steph) and Adam) and his daughter, Hoinu Thirumalai Bunce (Dave, and children, Selvi (Nate) and Anna). He will also be missed by many friends and family in USA, Canada, and India. He was a good friend to Jimmy, Lucky, Buddy, Lipsi and Kutti (dogs of the family). Celebration of Life service will take place at McColl Pond ELC in Savage, MN on August 10 from 10am to 2pm. In lieu of flowers, please direct any memorial contributions to Jesus India Christian Schools, 4725 W 144th St, Savage, MN 55378 (501c3).

Tribute Wall

DR

“ I am deeply saddened to learn about the passing of Dr. M.S. Thirumalai. My very first research paper was published in Language in India in 2012, and it has since received 31 citations. At that time, Dr. Thirumalai extended tremendous support and guidance to me. I will always cherish how kindly he used to address me as “Reddy Garu” and how he personally called me several times over phone to encourage and assist me in publishing many papers . His warmth, generosity, and dedication to nurturing scholars will always remain in my heart.



I extend my heartfelt condolences to his family and the Language in India community. May his soul rest in peace

Dr. P S. REDDY - September 25, 2025 at 11:43 AM



“ Dr Thirumalai was a very kind and gracious man, the stories he told at Bethany of his childhood have stayed with me. I am so very sorry, dear Swarna and family, may God bring you great comfort.

Sandra Taylor - June 25, 2025 at 10:28 PM

KM

“ I have a special place in my heart for Dr. Thirumalai. I had the privilege of being his TA and learned so much from him in that time. He taught me about book pagination and how to code basic html! Things that helped me in the future when I never dreamed I would use those skills. He provided my first letter of recommendation for finding a job after college. But more than those practical things, he was so kind, even tempered, and wise. He gave and was a blessing. I loved his and Swarna’s cooking! And I loved his quiet humor. I look back at my time with Dr. Thirumalai with fondness and know that he will be missed my many. May Swarna and their growing family be filled with peace and love as they share cherished memories of a life well lived. 💕💕

Kelly Martinez - June 23, 2025 at 09:19 PM

ML

“ Dr Thirumalai was like a second Dad to me during my time at BCOM. He would always check up on me, took me out to Indian prayer meetings and whenever he cooked up a storm, without fail he and Swarna would invite me. The impact he made on my life will live on for generations to come. He was truly a humble man that reflected the love of Christ well. I will definitely miss him (and his jokes) but it’s never goodbye for us as believers, it’s see you again. Thinking of you and the entire family, Swarna. Much love and hugs from Mara & Family- Trinidad & Tobago 🇹🇩 ... until we meet again. 🙏 ✨



maranesha lawrence - June 23, 2025 at 05:46 PM

CM

“ *Dr Thirumalai and Swarna you were such a blessing to me and my family when we were at BCOM! I pray for grace and peace for you and your family at this difficult time, Swarna.*

I am sorry I will be out of town and won't be able to attend the funeral. I will be praying.

*The Believer's Triumph
Romans 8:31-39*

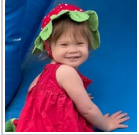
Carter MacFarlane - June 23, 2025 at 05:42 PM

S(

“ *Dr. Thirumulai and Swarna left a lasting impact upon me as a student at Bethany! He was a wise, kind and gentle soul. I recalled him sharing stories in class of the work in India and even upon my last visit to Bethany, I visited them at their home and was greatly encouraged. My condolences to Swarna and the family. May you comforted in knowing the lasting impact for the kingdom that Madasami had. May He in rest in the arms of our Heavenly Father!*

Shanya Gray (Gill)

Shanya Gray (Gill) - June 23, 2025 at 05:19 PM



“ *Dr. Thirumalai always cooked up big pots of delicious chicken curry for faculty meetings, making us eager to gather and discuss what was going well, where we were stuck and how to move forward.*

I was nervous when he first asked me in 1998 to be on his team of instructors to train the next generation of students. But he was a great encourager and mentor to me and always bolstered my confidence as I learned to train Americans., drawing from the hands-on experience I had in church planting for 15 years in the Philippines.

It was such an honor and joy to serve as an instructor under him in Spiritual Warfare, Women in Missions, Spiritual formation and Communicating God’s Story over a span of 20 years. I will always be indebted to him for making me feel capable and established in my work.

God bless you Swarna and your children. Thank you for giving your beloved husband and father to BGU for all those important years of BGU. May the Lord comfort and strengthen you now with his presence and hope. I love you, Swarna!!!

Carol Freeman - June 22, 2025 at 09:35 PM

RN

“ *Thirumalai uncle has been a blessing to our family. In the year 1990 when uncle and aunty left to the US, they asked us to come and stay in their house and it was given us for free as our family was involved in the Mission work. We lived in their house for 8 years and it was a great blessing for the extension of God's kingdom on this earth. Surely we are grateful for uncle and his whole family. May God comfort the whole family. Our prayers are there for you. Love you Swarna aunty.*

Revivalyn Jeba Navis - June 21, 2025 at 12:16 PM

PJ

“ *Thirumalai uncle was a great man of God, great support to us spiritually, great mentor to my family. He was my career counselor and mentor in my MDiv studies. He was a very kind, soft spoken, always smiling, enquire our well being. We miss him a lot. We have a great hope to see uncle in the eternity when we all get there. Our heartfelt condolences and prayers to Swarna auntie and the family members. Our God of all comforts will comfort you all. Praise and Thank God Almighty for uncle’s life whom impacted many around him.* 🙏

Pastor Sam Jacobs - June 20, 2025 at 11:00 PM

PJ

Sam, Stella, Don & Jerome Jacobs

Pastor Sam Jacobs - June 20, 2025 at 11:03 PM

KO

I was blessed to count Dr. Thirumalai as a friend, though our interactions were few. When he and Swarna arrived at Bethany, I was already serving on the field in northern Mexico. He consistently showed interest in what was happening in Mexico, especially regarding the country’s indigenous peoples. On several occasions, he invited me to share in his classes at BGU. He will be deeply missed by many and had a far greater impact on the lives of students and missionaries than he likely ever realized.

Kerry Olson - June 23, 2025 at 11:53 AM