

NEWS AND VIEWS

Journal of Applied Geochemistry
Vol.14, No. 2 (2012). pp 217- 220

OBITUARY



**B. P. RADHAKRISHNA
(1918-2012)**

Dr. B. P. Radhakrishna, the doyen of geological sciences in India passed away at his residence in Bangalore on the afternoon of 26th January, 2012, deeply mourned by his family, friends, near and dear ones including his extended family of geoscientists, admirers across the country. In his demise the country has lost the leading light in geoscience, - education, research and exploration - which found glorified expression on the pages of the Journal of Geological Society of India over the last several decades.

Born at Bangalore on 30th April 1918, Radhakrishna (popularly known as BPR) obtained the B.Sc (Honours) degree in Geology from the Central College at Bangalore and joined the erstwhile Mysore Geology Department (now Karnataka Mines and Geology Department) as Assistant at a very young age of 19, where he had an illustrious career spanning nearly 37 years as Exploration Geologist in various capacities, and then retired as its Director. Post retirement his checkered career reached a zenith as President of the Geological Society of India which he founded in 1958 along with a few other Greats of his time.

In a vast arena of study and research Radhakrishna strode like a colossus, leaving his indelible imprint in diversified fields such as Closepet Granite, Western Ghats evolution, Geology of Karnataka, Gold and other strategic mineral deposits, Sahyadri, lost river Saraswati, Water conservation, Environment, Engineering geology, - to mention only a few. His research on Closepet granite earned him Ph.D degree from the Mysore University. He suggested partial melting of Peninsular gneiss for the origin of the pink porphyritic granites. Radhakrishna's study brought to light that the domal uplift and rifting of the Western Ghats. The geomorphic evolution of the Sahyadris always fascinated him. He carried out extensive investigations on the geology of Karnataka which became the harbinger of flourishing mining and mineral industries in the state. He also investigated the foundation conditions of some major dam sites in Karnataka. His well-researched thoughts on geoscience were penned down in innumerable articles, editorials and books which have served as fulcrum and priceless treasure for research activities in the country well over five decades. For the practicing geologists, BPR always laid stress on hard field work, being of the opinion that "A thorough knowledge of rocks, minerals and soils through geological reconnaissance is of fundamental importance". His field guide books, field notes, articles are now indispensable aids for education of school and college students. In a rare analysis and revelation in Memoir 65, Radhakrishna chronicled milestones highlighting the trends in geoscience research in India over the last 50 years, which will ever remain a valuable document and a part of science history.

BPR had been a pioneer in hard rock hydrogeology in India. Hard rocks cover nearly two thirds of the country which suffer from chronic water scarcity. A visionary as he was, BPR understood the merit of hydrogeological studies in the country for overcoming the scourge of drought, and as early as sixties launched village-wise microlevel hydrogeological surveys in Karnataka, first among the states of India, heralding a new era in water management. Incidentally this is now a part of our National Water Policy . He was also pioneer in introducing and popularizing borewell technology in Peninsular India which in course of time became the backbone of drought proofing in the southern states. He also carried out feasibility studies for groundwater development in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh on behalf of Agricultural Finance Corporation. His efforts resulted in acceleration of groundwater development in Karnataka, which has since reached an advanced stage, though fifty years back the territory was considered as barren and parched. Till his last days he was a crusader of water security for the common man. He wrote and published extensively on the subject culminating in several landmark publications. Through his sustained efforts the Karnataka Groundwater Division is now one of the finest Groundwater Departments in the country. He advocated indigenous solution to the water management problems. based on local land and water endowments. Since 2007 he had been a guiding force behind National seminars/ workshops on groundwater management organized by the Geological Society at various centers in the country, and instrumental behind valuable publications on water management. Through these workshops he sent out the message that water management to succeed, discipline in water use and community participation are the two indispensable necessities. And hydrogeologists have a big role to play in this endeavor of rural resurgence. He believed that rainwater harvesting and water conservation are the only options before the country. Radhakrishna lamented that the nation is forgetful of its traditional knowledge systems of water conservation. The country needs revival of this 'dying wisdom' for its survival. He recalled how precious knowledge of rainfall distribution in ancient scripts helped our ancestors to plan for water conservation. BPR was much concerned with the growing water scarcity in the metropolitan cities which are the hubs of economic growth. He advocated groundwater legislation for its economical use, but was opposed to its commoditization and privatization.

The Vedic River Saraswati now lost in the desert sands of Thar (Rajasthan), always fascinated him. His publication on the lost river is a much valued document for all time to come, which not only revives the memory of a great civilization sustained or nurtured by the Saraswati , but also raises the hope of rediscovering the hidden course of Saraswati, – a vast freshwater source, - below the desert sands, given the recent technological advancements in subsurface exploration.

Being a votary of environmental harmony and sustainability, Radhakrishna stood like a rock against the ill-conceived proposal of interlinking of river basins. He was of the view that environmental flow in the river should not be interfered with and no river should go dry. He was always seized with the problem of human waste disposal and clean environment. In one of his last articles he reminded the society of the importance of sanitation and dry toilets. Nearly 30% of domestic water usage is lost in toilets. The country is still groping for a viable solution.

A charismatic leader not only in geological exploration, but also in science administration, Radhakrishna was Director, Department of Mines and Geology, Government of Karnataka; Chairman and Managing Director of Karnataka Copper Consortium; Adviser, Government of Karnataka for groundwater development; Member, Board of Directors of the Hutti Gold mines and Bharat Gold Mines limited; and also organized the Board of Minerals Development of Mysore State. He founded the Geological Society of India in 1958 and acted as its

Secretary (1958-74), Editor (1975-1992) and President (1992-2006). For the Geological Society, he was a fatherly figure who nurtured it with parental care since its inception till last days of his life,

An amiable, mild mannered, multi-faceted, well read and widely travelled versatile personality, he inspired many in the pursuit of knowledge. He had a sharp memory and was a man of extraordinary intellect. He had rare attributes of a philosopher and a dreamer, but remained a scientist and explorer to the core. BPR had a deep passion for Kannada literature, having himself authored a number of books in the language. He was much enamored with the spiritual and philosophical thoughts and writings like Tagore's Gitanjali, Kahlil Jibran's works, Vedic literature, Holy Geeta. His library of books reflected his keen interest in a wide range of subjects and disciplines, – science, art, literature, history. He had deep respect for our cultural heritage.

In recognition of his rare contributions to science and society, he was honored with many accolades like Doctor of Science from Indian School of Mines (Dhanbad) in 1992, Honorary Fellowships of Indian Academy of Sciences in 1956, Indian National Academy of Sciences in 1972, Geological Society of London in 1986 and Geological Society of America in 1990, which culminated in the prestigious national award of Padmasree in 1991, Visweswaryya award in 1996, and Karnataka Rajyotsava award in '1976. He was also recipient of National Mineral Award for Excellence 2000, D.N.Wadia Medal 1992, Millennium Award of the Indian Society of Applied Geochemists (ISAG) 2000, and Jawaharlal Nehru Birth Centenary Award 2007 from Indian Science Congress Association. He visited USA at the invitation of the University of North Carolina in 1977, and participated in ATO conference on Early History of the Earth in U.K.

Science journalism was his forte. The Journal of Geological Society of India reached a pinnacle of excellence under his able leadership. He wrote many magnificent editorials on all current geological topics or environmental problems, and leading personalities of the world who shaped the course of science and history like Einstein, Raman, Tagore, Nehru, Sethna, Obama, Darwin, Madame Curie to name only a few. He received Karnataka Sahitya Academy awards twice (1992 & 1997) for his biographical works. The Journal of Geological Society of India is now the premier mouthpiece of geological community and research in India, having one of the largest circulations in the world of geoscience, and which has never failed to reach the readers on the first of the month. Till his last days he fashioned the Journal, - both in its contents and focus, - starting from the very cover page.

Science can evolve, and new ideas can emerge, only through a process of debates and interactions, which he always encouraged. A notable contribution of Radhakrishna was introduction of Monthly and Special lectures as a regular curriculum in the Society. He always welcomed new ideas, and kept himself abreast of even the most current developments in geoscience.

In post Bose-Saha- Raman era, Radhakrishna was among the few other leaders who brought Indian science to the world stage.

BPR followed a simplistic life style, but was a strict disciplinarian, believing in the value of time as he worked with almost clockwise precision, - a rare trait of character in these days.

Radhakrishna's departure has left a void difficult to fill in. His endearing smile and beaming persona welcomed one and all to his reading room, which was visited by many Greats in the world over the decades. Truly speaking, this room turned into an 'ashram' of a sage, sanctified by his vibrant thoughts, lively writings and intercourses or discourses, and a treasure of knowledge with books all around. In a strict sense he was a 'Guru' of Vedic times. This room which had been witness to this long, eventful, glorious life, and a witness to his last sojourn to eternity, now remains deserted but for his lingering memory.

I last met him on the afternoon of 23rd January, 2012, when I saw him engrossed in the Works of Kalidasa. As our talks gathered steam, Prof. Manish Mamtani joined us. While we departed he wanted me to come back on Saturday for some detailed discussions. We were working on an analytical synthesis of his thoughts in articles and publications on water and their enduring relevance. Little could I realize that it was my last interaction with BPR ! That Saturday was never to come!

Radhakrishna is no more. The Geological community has lost its greatest patron, the country has lost the tallest of the peers in geosciences of the day, and a noble soul. His voice has lapsed into silence, his pen which ceaselessly wrote brilliant editorials has stopped. The voice which inspired so many, lit the light of knowledge, has fallen silent forever.

He has left us a legacy, - a treasure of knowledge and a golden tradition for unwavering pursuit of science and truth. Let's be worthy of it.

Date: 03-10-2012

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