

William Dixon West **(1901-1994)**

In the passing away of William Dixon West, Professor Emeritus, University of Saugar, M.P., in his 94th year, we have lost a doyen of earth sciences in India. His dedicated service and contributions spanning over seven decades for the growth and development of the Geological Survey of India and the Department of Applied Geology, University of Saugar, has left an indelible mark in the history of earth sciences in India.



W.D. West (1901-1994)

West was born on 27th January, 1901, at Bournemouth, England. He spent his childhood at Jesselton, British North Borneo, where his father A.J. West, constructed the first railway and the town of Weston there was named after him. West was educated at the King's School, Canterbury, where he became Captain of the School and Vice-Captain of the football team. Even at school, he was interested in geology and used to prepare thin sections of rocks given to him by Harker - the well known metamor-

phic petrologist. This early hobby later developed into his main pursuit when in 1920 he joined the St. John's College, Cambridge University, where he was very much influenced by teachers like Harker, Woods and Marr. At Cambridge, he made a mark in geology with the award of the Winchester Prize in 1922. This was followed by brilliant performance with First Class in Natural Tripos to be crowned with Harkness Scholarship in 1923.

West and the Geological Survey of India

On his arrival in India in 1923, as Assistant Superintendent in the Geological Survey of India, West joined the camp of L. L. Fermor who introduced him to the well-known Sausar Series in the Nagpur and Chhindwara Districts in the then Central Provinces and Berar. In fact, this early interest led him to discover in 1936, the 'Deolapar Nappe' in the Sausar, and also the structure of 'Shali Window' near Simla in 1939. He also excelled in petrological and petrogenetic studies of the Deccan lava flows of western India. This area later became his main field of investigation.

During 1940-42, he led a team of scientists to Afghanistan for exploration of coal in the Jurassic Saighan Series and for his outstanding work the Afghan Government conferred on him the title of 'Star of Afghanistan'. Another subject which interested West was earthquakes to which he made significant contributions specially on the Baluchisthan earthquake of 25th and 27th August, 1931 and the Quetta earthquake of 31st May, 1935. All this work inspired him to deliver the Presidential Address on 'Earthquakes in India', to the Geology and Geography Section of the Indian Science Congress in 1937.

West played a vital role in a wide range of geoscientific activities in India. He was founder fellow of the National Institute of Sciences in India, 1935, and became its Vice-President in 1945. He had close association with the Indian Science Congress and was its General Secretary from 1932 to 1938, and later in 1972 became its General President. He delivered his Presidential Address on 'Geology in the Service of India', to the Indian Science Congress in 1972. In recognition of his services, the British Government in 1947, honoured him with C.I.E. (Companion of the Indian Empire). In 1947, West became President of the Mining, Geological and Metallurgical Institute of India. In 1950, he became President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, which awarded him the P.N. Bose Memorial Medal in 1959.

West was made Director of the Geological Survey of India in December 1945. During his tenure (1945-1951), he planned, organised and expanded the Geological Survey with a vision and foresight which is reflected in the way he prepared the first and second five year plans for scientific growth and development of this organisation in new areas that we see today. In 1951, West admirably organised the Centenary celebrations of the Geological Survey of India, and for this achievement he was

awarded the Lyell Medal by the Geological Society, London. He devoted 28 years of his life in the service of the Geological Survey of India from where he retired in 1951. He was elected as a foundation fellow of the Geological Society of India in 1958.

West and the University of Saugar

West returned to England in 1951, but he was missing the rocks and geological environment of India with which he had become familiar. While he was in England, Dr. R.P. Tripathi, the then Vice-Chancellor, University of Saugar, invited him to join the University as Professor and Head of the Department of Geology. He accepted this invitation and joined the University in January 1955. At Saugar, West organised, planned and developed the Department of Applied Geology with the donation of Rs. 6.5 lakhs made through the UGC to the University of Saugar by the then Central Provinces Manganese Ore Company Limited (CPMO), Nagpur. As a visionary, West laid the foundation of a course in Applied Geology which was in keeping with the future needs of teaching, research and field training of Indian geologists to face the challenges of the country. Recognising the excellent performance and allround progress made by the Applied Geology Department, the UGC raised the status of the Department to one of a Centre of Advanced Study in Geology in 1963. In the same year Prof. West was elected Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology of the University and in January 1971, he was elevated as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Saugar, which position he occupied with distinction. He was also successful in procuring a generous grant from the British Government under the Colombo Plan, for new instruments to modernise the existing facilities in the Department.

Prof. West was elected the first President of the Indian Association of Geohydrologists in 1964. Concerned with the needs of the Society, he initiated in 1975, 'A Groundwater Development Project', in collaboration with the Government of Madhya Pradesh, to prospect and evaluate the groundwater potentialities in different geological formations of the State and made substantial contributions in this area.

Prof. West was a first rate field geologist and believed in the development of individual personality. He supervised and guided the Doctoral Dissertations of 18 students who now occupy high positions in the country. For his distinguished services to the cause of Indian geology, the University of Saugar, Banaras Hindu University and the Indian School of Mines, conferred on him D.Sc. (*Honoris Causa*). Prof. West was held in high esteem and in 1971, a commemorative volume prepared by his colleagues, students and admirers from all over the world, was presented to him in recognition of his long dedicated service to research and teaching of earth science in our country. He had keen interest in football and this saw him as Professor-in-charge of the game at Saugar University. In addition, he was also the President of the Saugar District Football

Association and actually his love for the game revived football in Saugar town. He was also a member of Madhya Pradesh Council of Sports, Bhopal. Prof. West had many other interests like dog keeping, photography and cinematography, which gave him immense satisfaction and happiness. Infact, he produced a few documentaries with regard to teaching geology and folk dances etc. in the University.

Prof. West was an outstanding field geologist who loved outdoor life. On the occasion of the 125th Anniversary Celebrations of the Geological Survey of India in 1976, he remarked in his reminiscences, 'One looks back nostalgically to those days, when one experienced the exhilaration of winter morning in the highlands of Central India, or watched the sun rising over paddy fields of Bengal, or rested one's eyes on the lovely green of a fertile Himalayan valley - the villages rich with walnut trees, and with maize growing in the terraced fields. These delights can still be experienced, but now the roads seem longer and the hills steeper than afore.'

Prof. West retired from the University of Saugar in 1977 and was made Professor Emeritus for life with all the facilities in the Department. Even after retirement, he kept busy and regularly came to the Department where he was always available for guidance on various matters not only to the staff, research scholars and students of the Department but all those who sought his advice.

Prof. West was not keeping well for the last few months and had difficulty in walking and seeing. It is only on 7th July, 1994, that I had the opportunity to meet him at Saugar. Although he was lying in bed he still shook hands with me saying, 'thank you for coming'. Little did I realise at that time that this would be the last meeting with my mentor whose life was an example of a true teacher with the courtesy of bygone generation.

Prof. West devoted more than 38 valuable years of his life for the growth and development of Applied Geology Department, his own child in Saugar University.

Prof. West married to geology as he often used to say, breathed his last in the morning hours of 23rd July, 1994, at Bhopal, where he was shifted for medical treatment. The love and affection he cherished for the geological community in India continued till his last days. Not only the staff and students of the University Department of Applied Geology but the people of Saugar town and geoscientists of the Geological Survey of India will sorely miss him now. Prof. West has left an indelible mark in the history of Indian Geology, and he will be remembered with reverence, great respect and honour.

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