

OBITUARY



S. NARAYANASWAMI

(1917—1978)

Fellows of the Geological Society and the large community of Earth Scientists will have heard with deep regret the sudden death of Sri Sellappa Narayanaswami at Kolar Gold Field on 15th March 1978 at the age of 61. Sri Narayanaswami, after retirement from service as Deputy Director General, Geological Survey of India (Airborne Mineral Surveys), had settled down in Madras. He however, kept himself active, giving a course of lectures to students of marine geology at the Cochin University and another course of lectures on mineral exploration to the students of the Post Graduate Centre for Technical Studies at Sandur. He had, accepted the position of a part time professor in the A. C. College of Engineering, Guindy, Madras and in fact had taken a party of students of the A. C. College on a study tour of Kolar Gold Field. From morning till late in the evening he was busy in the field explaining to the students with his characteristic enthusiasm the complexity of the structure and peculiarities of gold mineralisation. The same night while resting he had a massive heart attack and died immediately thereafter. The tragic part was that his only son and his beloved wife were away in London and the news of his death could not reach them in time.

Sellappa Narayanaswami hailed from a respectable orthodox merchant family of Chettiars of Coimbatore. He was born at Tangapalyam, Coimbatore District, on the 12th of December, 1917. His father was Sri E. K. Sellappa Chettiar. His early education was at Tiruppur, where he took the University Matriculation Examination and passed with distinction standing first in his school. Thereafter much against his father's wishes he went to Madras to pursue higher studies foregoing a lucrative ancestral business and extensive agricultural property.

He joined the Presidency College, Madras and took his B.Sc. degree in 1938 with Geology as the main and Botany and Zoology as subsidiary subjects and the M.A. degree in 1940. He did some teaching work at the Presidency College for

about seven months before joining the Geological Survey of India as an Assistant Geologist in the year 1942. He served the Geological Survey of India for an unbroken period of 35 years. The first six years were devoted to systematic geological mapping and mineral surveys in Tinnevely District, Tamil Nadu, under the direction and supervision of Dr. M. S. Krishnan. It was here, in the most impressionable period of his life, he got intimately acquainted with Archaean geology, a subject on which he was to make important contributions in later years. The survey and demarcation of a number of deposits of high grade limestone lead to the establishment of one of the largest cement factories in Tamil Nadu by India Cements at Talaiyuthur. In 1946 he got married to Poorna Lakshmi who also happened to be a student of Prof. Muthuswamy from the Presidency College. She too joined the Geological Survey and worked side by side with Sri Narayanaswami at Calcutta for several years. She gave up the job when Sri Narayanaswami got promoted as Superintending Geologist and moved out of Calcutta. She followed Narayanaswami like a shadow and looked after him with great devotion and care. Had she continued in the Geological Survey, she would have been a Director of a circle by now.

Apart from the early work in Tinnevely, Narayanaswami's main work consisted of the study of the geology of the manganese ore deposits of Madhya Pradesh and the adjoining parts of Maharashtra along with John Straczek of the USGS. This work gave him an opportunity to undergo training in U.S.A. in Economic Geology at the University of Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the U.S. Geological Survey.

After his return from U.S., he was entrusted with the work of structural mapping and detailed exploration of the Kolar Gold Field and the study of all the previously known gold fields of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. This work he carried out with great distinction and incidentally trained a number of young men in mineral exploration.

He was a member of the Kashyap Committee which went into the reorganisation of the Geological Survey of India. He visited USSR and Canada in 1960 in connection with the work of the Committee and drafted a good part of the report. One of the main recommendations of the Committee was the decentralisation of work of the Geological Survey and the opening of circle offices in each of the States of the Indian union. Ironically he became the first victim of his own proposal and got posted to Shillong at the N.E. corner of India. Within two years he was again transferred, this time to Kerala, in the far south, and later on to Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. He did not like being tossed about from place to place in this manner, but carried out the work entrusted to him with great sincerity and devotion. It was while he was in Andhra he discovered and organised the exploration of the now famous East Coast bauxite deposits. A large number of young geologists from different parts of the country came under his influence and learnt the techniques of geological survey and mineral exploration. They look upon him as their 'Guru'.

For reasons not known, he missed several promotional chances in the Survey and it was only in 1972 he was appointed as Deputy Director General and posted to Jaipur as Head of the western region. This gave him an opportunity to understand the geology of the Aravalli group and to get a clear insight into the copper-lead-zinc mineralisation of that region. He got posted to Bangalore as Deputy Director General in charge of the Airborne Mineral Surveys when the post became vacant on the death of Dr. A. P. Subramanian. He retired from service in 1975. After retirement he was appointed as a member of the Board of Directors of the Bharat Gold Mines Limited.

As a man, Narayanaswami was gentle and soft spoken. Never did a harsh word escape from his mouth. Although he appeared mild and pliable he was adamant when it came to sacrificing principles and would not yield ground. He was an exceptionally good teacher and delighted in sharing his knowledge with as many of his young colleagues as possible. He had a remarkable collection of detailed maps of different parts of the country which he would display with pride during the course of his lectures.

Sri Narayanaswami took a very active part in all the activities of the Geological Society. He was a foundation fellow and served on the Council for a number of years. He was a most active member on the Editorial Board and spent a good part of his time in going through the many manuscripts sent for his comments. His comments recorded in his neat hand on the margin were always constructive and helped the authors to improve on their previous drafts. His sudden death is a tragic loss to his family and the Geological Society of India.

B. P. R.

A Correction

The names of the authors of the paper 'Geochronology of the Jammu Limestone, Udhampur District, Jammu & Kashmir State, India' published in pages 221-223 of the May issue of the Journal is mentioned as P. K. Raha, M. C. Chandy and M. N. Balasubrahmanyam. The name M. C. Chandy should be corrected to read as K. C. Chandy.