

OBITUARY



DR. SURI BALAKRISHNA
(1931 - 1984)

It is with deep regret I have to record that Dr. Suri Balakrishna, Deputy Director, National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad, is no more. His sudden and premature demise occurred in the early hours of September 9, 1984 due to heart failure. Balakrishna had distinguished himself as a reputed Earth Scientist, an able administrator and a dynamic organiser during over 30 years of his academic and scientific career. His sudden death has caused a void which is difficult to fill.

Balakrishna was well-known for his pioneering work on physical properties of rocks in general and ultrasonic studies on elastic properties of rocks in particular. His other equally important contributions include exploration for groundwater, dam site investigations, field investigations on structural as well as economic geology of Cuddapah basin of Andhra Pradesh.

His research studies began in 1952 and he was awarded the Ph.D. degree by the Osmania University in 1955 in recognition of his work on 'Physical properties of rocks and their relation to certain geological features'. He had the distinction of working as a post-doctoral research fellow in Dunbar laboratories of Harvard University, U.S.A. during 1956-57, on elasticity of Indian rocks under high pressure and temperature.

Ever since his return to India from U.S.A. in 1957, Balakrishna spent his time and energy, offered dynamic leadership and used his national and international contacts, for shaping and building up the geology department of the Osmania University as a modern teaching and research centre in the country. He was the Head of the Department from 1958 to 1964, which position he held in honorary capacity after his appointment as Assistant Director in the National Geophysical Research Institute in October 1962. During this period he also initiated and obtained assistance for establishing a full fledged Geophysics Department at the Osmania University with the support of the University Grants Commission and the Government of

USSR. He thus sowed the seeds for an institution which is known as the Centre of Exploration Geophysics in the Osmania University.

Balakrishna played a significant role in the development of the National Geophysical Research Institute ever since its inception, and served the Institute for over a period of two decades with full commitment, sincerity, devotion and boundless enthusiasm. At NGRI he established a Division of physical Properties of Rocks and conducted research on elastic properties of rocks by employing the latest ultrasonic techniques. He continued to make valuable contributions in this field till he was called upon in 1972 to shoulder greater responsibilities to undertake much bigger task of groundwater exploration and location of well sites in the drought-hit areas of different parts of the country. Soon, he established close linkages with several state Governments and Central Government agencies including Indian Railways and mobilized the Institute's resources for groundwater prospecting in several places in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and many other regions through large-scale field geophysical surveys. He also initiated another research programme of Dam site investigations mainly to help civil engineers to locate sound and secure foundations. He continued his endeavours in these applied research areas and sponsored projects for over a decade. His latest research activities included geological and geophysical investigations in the Cuddapah Basin, both for basic and applied studies, under an UNDP project of which he was the Project Manager.

Balakrishna organized many seminars, symposia and workshops on various aspects of Earth Sciences. He held many honorary positions of responsibility such as Secretary, Indian Geophysical Union, Andhra Pradesh Academy of Sciences, and Indian National Committee for International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics. He was member of the Governing Body and the Executive Council of the Centre of Earth Science Studies, Trivandrum. He was also a member of several Governmental Committees, such as Geoscience Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Petroleum and Chemicals, Government of India; Member-Secretary of the working group on Non-Ferrous Metals and Minerals set up by the Cabinet Secretariat; and Academic Councils of Andhra and Osmania Universities. He had travelled widely and attended a number of conferences and symposia in different countries.

He published more than 130 research papers in scientific journals in India and abroad and had over 90 technical reports on bed-rock and groundwater investigations to his credit. He edited a number of books and guided over 15 students and Junior colleagues in their doctoral work. He was awarded Krishnan Gold Medal for the year 1967 for his work on physical properties of rocks, and Diamond Jubilee Award in Earth Sciences of the Osmania University in the year 1979.

He was generous and humane in nature, an ideal host and always prepared to help the needy and the poor. To his students and colleagues in the University and the Institute, he was a guide, friend and philosopher. He possessed abounding energy, organizational abilities and capacity to work.

Balakrishna was born on August 3, 1931 of illustrious parents - Prof. Suri Bhagavantam and Mrs. Sita Mahalakshmi. He took his B.Sc. (Hons) and M.Sc. degrees in Geology from Andhra University in first class in the years 1952 and 1953 before joining Osmania University of Hyderabad for his doctoral work. He leaves behind his old father, brothers, sister, wife Indira, two sons, a daughter and a large number of his friends within and outside the country, to mourn his loss and to remember him for the great qualities of his head and heart.