

NOTES

(The following appreciation of the work of Professor Rajendra Kumar Goel whose obituary was published in Vol 41(2), 1993, pp. 175-176 in the Journal, was received from Prof. John Talent, which is reproduced below)

PROFESSOR RAJENDRA KUMAR GOEL

Rajendra Kumar Goel graduated with BSc and MSc degrees (1952 and 1954) from Banaras Hindu University, and became a temporary lecturer there from 1954 to 1956. He then became the foundation head of the Department of Geology at Hamidia Degree College in Bhopal (1958-1962) and then proceeded to France where he obtained a DSc (Doctorat d'Etat) from the University of Bordeaux. Goel's monumental thesis on the Late Cretaceous foraminifers of the French Chalk was subsequently published as a Bulletin No.5 of the Bureau de Recherche geologique et mineralogique.

Goel then spent about a year visiting various geological institutions in West Germany and returned to India where Professor R.S. Mitthal, who had been a fellow lecturer at BHU, enticed him to join the Department of Geology at the University of Roorkee. He remained at Roorkee, apart from brief stints with UNESCO in Zaire, and sabbatical leaves or research fellowships in France (1971), at Macquarie University in Sydney (1974-1975, 1984), and the University of Hokkaido (late 1985). In 1990 he took a prominent part in "The Professor's New Clothes", a film on scientific fraud. He retired as Head of the Department of Earth Sciences at Roorkee in June 1992.

Goel retained his interest in Mesozoic and Cainozoic foraminifers throughout his life but delved into other areas: Palaeozoic and Mesozoic stratigraphy, sedimentary structures, Problematica, and tectonics of the Himalaya. In the 1970s he turned to the study of conodonts, producing an elegant contribution on the Early Triassic conodonts of Spiti. In later years he had commenced study of the Conodonts associated with the neglected Ordovician faunas of the Himalaya. One of the projects we had planned for our retirement was to have generated a coffee-table book on the teahouses of India and their colourful denizens.

My first meeting with Rajendra Goel was for a period of 3 weeks in December 1969 at UNESCO's Bois du Rocher Chateau at Jouy-en-Josas near Paris where we were being briefed for UNESCO assignments: he to take up the position of Professor of Petrology in revolution-torn Zaire, me heading for the then more tranquil University of Dhaka. Our friendship was immediate and enduring. Goel returned to Roorkee from his virtually impossible mission, in the midst of curfews, murder and mayhem, and in 1971 we initiated joint research on aspects of the stratigraphy and palaeontology of the Himalaya.

In Kashmir, to our dismay, we found areas of Cambrian-Carboniferous geology we examined to differ alarmingly from the way they had been presented in the literature. Instance the locality from which well-preserved Late Silurian graptolites had been reported proving to be intensely deformed and pre-Late Ordovician (conceivably even Cambrian or Late Proterozoic) in age, and reports of Silurian and Middle Devonian shelly faunas having come from indubitably Late Ordovician horizons, correctly reported early in the century. That we were observing just the tips of vast icebergs of academic fraud is now well known and need not be detailed. I can recall Rajendra and the late N.G.K. Nair standing

on the outrageous "graptolite locality", both visibly shaken, virtually speechless. Rajendra wanted something to be done about it, immediately.

That we procrastinated is true, but the charge of procrastination should be laid more at my feet than at Goel's. I had hoped that the fraudulent enterprise we had stumbled on would be extinguished without any need for us to intervene, but Goel insisted, correctly, that the longer the enterprise was allowed to run the greater the damage to the reputation image of Indian science and to the image of the geological profession. We realised that disclosing this fraudulent enterprise could bring us into disrepute, but for Goel this was of no moment.

I recall how in late 1980, when I was visiting Professor at the University of Roorkee, Rajendra placed on my desk an initial bibliography with copies of relevant reprints in his possession, and asked me to draft carefully worded expose that would flag this body of 'data' as spurious, to be ignored or handled with extreme caution. I continued to procrastinate until January 1987 when I wrote to Rajendra suggesting we present our expose at the Second International Congress on the Devonian System being held in Calgary in August that year. His response was swift: "I am ready to be counted, regardless of the consequences!".

Most of us who are bilingual or multilingual can go through life without being able to crack jokes in anything but our mother tongue. Goel took to languages like Ravi Shankar to the sitar. Instance August 1972 when, with special premission from the Government of India, Goel and I examined key sections in Spiti. Within 10 days, with a smattering of Tibetan picked up from our muleman and others, Goel was able to crack jokes in Tibetan with the locals - in obscure temples and mud huts, or awaiting a turn to cross the rivers of Spiti by wire ropes (julas). During a sojourn in Japan he picked up a smattering of Japanese with remarkable rapidity. Even more remarkable was his phonetic accuracy in no matter what language he conversed: elegant in French, perfect in English. He spoke virtually accentless English - better than any other Indian I have known. He should have been a linguist or philologist.

In every way, physically and intellectually, Rajendra Goel was an impressive person. He was so close to 2 metres in height that someone suggested he could be used as an alternative metric scale! He was also monumentally kind; so much so he could have been accused of prodigality with his time. He was accessible to all: from government ministers and vice-chancellors to rickshaw wallahs, and teahouse proprietors. All were treated with equal kindness and respect. He had friends for friendship's sake and not just as a by-product of some political, academic or other affiliation. For him, every soul was of equal value. He was, incidentally, a skilled grower of roses and won many competitions for the quality of blooms he produced.

Rajendra Goel was greatly devoted to his family: his wife Santosh and children Anurag, Vandana and Gaurav, all three of whom have achieved higher degrees in computing science. It was in the USA that he suffered a massive heart attack on 18 October and passed away on the 22nd.

With his command of language, light humour and humility Rajendra Goel was an impressive ambassador for his country. No one will ever fill the void he leaves in the hearts of those who knew him.