

CORRESPONDENCE

M.S. KRISHNAN – REMINISCENCES

Mr. Prasad, an old friend of mine in the GSI, in his note on Dr. M.S. Krishnan (Jour. Geol. Soc. India, v.52, p.140) has made some wrong and misleading statements concerning the late Dr. L. A. N. Iyer. The following are the correct facts as narrated to me by my late father, Dr. L. A. N. Iyer, during his service in the GSI and after his retirement.

Before proceeding to England in 1927 on study leave for 2 years for his PhD degree, Iyer met Dr. Edwin Pascoe, Director, and his next-in-command and successor as Director, Dr. L. L. Fermor. They advised Iyer not to go in for a PhD but to take the (lesser) ARCS degree instead, which they said was better suited for Indian geologists for field work in which they found them weak. Iyer replied that as he already had an MA degree from Madras University which was at the same level as the ARCS, he would like to take the higher PhD degree which some Indian geologists had already done, and soon left for England. After Iyer had left, Dr. Fermor wrote to Prof. W. W. Watts, Iyer's prospective research director at the Imperial College of Science and Technology in London, that he should be registered for the ARCS and not the PhD degree. After interviewing Iyer in London and testing him, Prof. Watts took him in straight for a PhD, and replied to Dr. Fermor that he had found Iyer very good and had got him registered for the PhD degree. Drs. Pascoe and Fermor obviously did not relish this and had a grudge against Iyer. Dr. Iyer returned to India in 1929 after completing his PhD in a little over one year under Prof. Watts and thereafter conducted some research work under him.

It is not true as stated by Prasad that Dr. Iyer was "reprimanded and never secured promotion during his long tenure in the Geological Survey." On the other hand, when Dr. Iyer met Drs. Pascoe and Fermor on his return to Calcutta in 1929, they formally congratulated him on his achievement and success. But the grudge remained, particularly with Dr. Fermor, until his retirement.

Those days, the GSI was a very small organization consisting of fewer than 20 gazetted officers, and all the posts in the higher cadres were held by Britishers while the Indian officers held lower posts. Dr. Iyer got his promotion to the Class I cadre of Geologist in 1939 during Dr. Herron's tenure after having had to miss two chances against a vacancy in 1935 and 1937. During that period, a vacancy for promotion occurred only once in 2 to 5 years. Many senior officers of the Survey like Drs. Herron, E. L. G. Clegg, C. S. Fox, J. A. Dunn, with whom Dr. Iyer had worked, held him in high regard for his ability and calibre both as a field geologist and researcher.

After his promotion, Dr. Iyer was in the Class I cadre of Geologists for nearly 8 years from 1939 to 1947 during which period Dr. M. S. Krishnan was also his fellow officer for a few years in the same cadre before his elevation. During his tenure as Petrologist in charge of the Petrological Laboratory for two years in the GSI, Dr. Iyer published his "Handbook of Precious Stones." He retired as a senior member in the Geologist cadre in the beginning of 1946 (one year ahead of his date of superannuation in 1947) on earned leave for one year, to accept the offer of the first J. N. Tata Professorship and Head of the newly constituted Post-Graduate Department of Geology at Patna University which he organized and set up, and then retired in 1951. The then British Government in India conferred on Dr. Iyer, before his retirement from the GSI, the title of "Rao Bahadur" in 1945 as "a mark of personal distinction" during his service in the GSI.

Incidentally I may mention that both Dr. M.S. Krishnan and the late Prof. Muthuswamy of the Presidency College, Madras were students of Dr. L.A.N. Iyer when he was an Assistant Professor there, prior to joining GSI.

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