



**Prof P. G. Cooray**  
(1921-2003)

Prof. P. G. Cooray, a renowned geologist and geoscience educator, breathed his last in the early hours of January 4, 2003, a few days after he celebrated his 82nd birthday in Hindagala, Sri Lanka. The geoscientific community, particularly of Sri Lanka and South Asia, has lost an illustrious geologist, a visionary, a geoscience educator *par excellence*, a humane and an affectionate person. He will be remembered for his contributions to the study of charnockites, for his innumerable Geoscientific Writing Workshops and for his vision for Geoscience Education, in particular for the Third World.

Affectionately called "Jerry", Prof Percival Gerard Cooray was born in Kuala Lumpur where he received his early education. On coming to Sri Lanka, he continued his studies at St Thomas College, Mt. Lavinia and at the University of Ceylon where he served as a demonstrator for a short while. Later he joined the Department of Mineralogy (the present Geological Survey and Mines Bureau) of Sri Lanka. At the Imperial College of London, he obtained his B.Sc. Honours with First Class and Ph.D. under the guidance of a person of the stature of H.H. Read. He received several prizes from the Imperial College for his excellent work. His pioneering work on charnockites led to the publication of two important papers in the Journal of Geological Society of London (1962) and the American Journal of Science (1969), which are considered as benchmark papers.

Back in the beautiful island nation, Prof Cooray

mapped extensively, recognised and named the major Precambrian units of Sri Lanka (for example, Highland Complex, Highland Series, Wannai Complex and others), and worked on aspects as varied as sedimentary structures and geomorphic evolution. He was responsible for bringing out several memoirs, reports and the Geological Map of Sri Lanka, first in black and white (1967) and later in colour (1982). He also wrote the book entitled "An Introduction to the Geology of Sri Lanka" in 1967. One of his landmark contributions is the initiation, organization and leadership of the Scientific Expedition to the Knuckles Massif. A line drawing of the Knuckles Massif decorated the letter-head of the creative and artistic Cooray.

Prof Cooray returned to the teaching profession in 1967 and continued teaching at the University of Peradeniya till his last days. He taught and rose to the positions of Professor of Geology and Dean at the Universities of Ife (Nigeria), Zambia and the Senior Editor at the Directorate General of Mineral Resources of Saudi Arabia.

He came back to Sri Lanka in 1986 and settled in Mahakanda, a scenic and salubrious country-side location close to the University of Peradeniya. He could be seen in his study with a number of books and notes around him. He worked for long hours even on the huge dining table half of which used to be covered by reading materials. He single-handedly conducted more than 50 Scientific Writing Workshops in the Indian Ocean rim countries, which benefited over 1400 participants. He contributed

enormously to popularizing Geosciences in Sri Lankan schools by way of lectures, workshops for teachers, writing books and reading materials with assistance from colleagues.

Prof. Cooray was associated with several international bodies. He was a member of several IGCP's, the ICSU Committee on Teaching of Science, member and Chairman, IUGS Commission on Geoscience Education and Training, Member of Council and President, Association of Geoscientists for International Development.

He goaded Pakistani geoscientists to organize the first South Asian Geological Congress (GEOSAS) in 1991, and has been called the "Godfather of GEOSAS". With the assistance of friendly colleagues and admiring friends, Prof Cooray, at the age of 74, organized the Second GEOSAS at the Galadari Marriott Hotel in Colombo in 1995, which was a run-away success. The planning and execution of the Congress were exemplary.

Prof. Cooray was the Founder Member, Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science, and a Member/Fellow of several academic bodies both in Sri Lanka and other countries. He was a Fellow of the Geological Society of London and the Geological Society of India, and was conferred the Honorary Fellowship of the Geological Society of America in 1995. He was awarded the Sri Lanka NARES A National Award for Scientific Achievement. The Geological Society of Sri Lanka, in 1995, instituted an award in his name - "P.G. COORAY MEDAL" - to be given to a young geoscientist.

Besides being a renowned geologist, Prof Cooray was into music, drama and nature. He was an organist too. Wherever he lived, he was associated with the local choir. "A hammer in one hand and a baton in the other" - That is how Prof Cooray described himself. With baton he conducted choirs and with hammer he was a geologist of international acclaim. Prof. Cooray founded the Colombo Philharmonic Choir in 1955. How much he enjoyed music

can be gauged from the words he spoke at a symposium on Aesthetics in Science organized by the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science: "There have been times when the sound produced by the Colombo Philharmonic Choir in one of the choral works has made my hair stand on end, and at such times I have been in the aesthetic domain with great intensity".

Gerry Cooray was a warm, affectionate, smiling person and always full of energy and enthusiasm. Even towards the end of his journey of life, he was busy writing and had nearly completed two books titled "Pioneers in Geology" and "Quaternary of Sri Lanka". At the same time, he was editing a book titled "Geology and Mineral Resources of Sri Lanka".

Prof. Cooray lived life to the hilt in the loving company of his wife Joan whom he affectionately addressed as "Da" (short form of Darling). Our deepest sympathies go out to Joan, daughter Shanthini and other members of the bereaved family. The spate of condolence messages that came from the all over the world is an eloquent testimony to both his contributions to the cause of Geosciences and Geoscience Education and the warmth that he exuded.

He wrote philosophically, and perhaps prophetically too, in his last article as follows: "The questions I ask myself at this stage of my life are: Have I justified my existence here on earth and have I successfully completed the task I was sent here to do? Have I contributed anything of value to the well-being of those among whom I have lived? Perhaps I have and perhaps I haven't, but the real answers to those questions will be given to me when I face my Maker on the other side!" Questions indeed that each one of us should ponder over.

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