

OBITUARY



Prof. Neelam Leelananda Rao
(1923 - 2012)

A devoted teacher, an indefatigable researcher, a towering personality and verily a superstar in the firmament of Indian Earth Scientists — Prof. Neelam Leelananda Rao, a founder member of the Department of Geology, University of Madras passed away on the 7th July 2012 after a brief illness. Prof. Rao was born in Nellore where his father Sri Neelam Mangapathy Naidu was a senior officer in the collectorate. After his early education at his home town, Rao took his M.Sc. degree from the Andhra University, and was the rank-holder that year. At Vizag, he was mentored by Profs. C. Mahadevan and C. Rajagopalan. He then joined the Madras Educational Subordinate Service, and was posted to Government Engineering College, Anantapur where from he got transferred to the Presidency College, Madras. Prof. Rao was an excellent teacher who used to prepare exhaustively for his lectures. Though he would speak on any topic with clarity and brevity, his special subjects were Crystallography, Mineralogy and Igneous and Metamorphic Petrology. His passion for field studies was matchless and induced many students and colleagues like me to give due credence to field data and documentation. Prof. Rao took sabbatical leave to join the just then started Geology Department of the Madras University at its Guindy campus as a full time scholar under the well-known academician Prof. P.R.J. Naidu. His doctoral research was on the Pallavaram charnockites and associated granulitic suites of the presently termed mobile belt. Later, He joined the

university faculty as Reader, and became Professor and Head. He guided quite a retinue of doctorate scholars on problems related to the enormous variety of Archaean crystallines of the Pandyan Mobile Belt. He, somehow, did not pay attention to publish his valuable findings in the journals. Profs. Naidu and Rao formed the Mineralogical Society of India, and in the first issue of the journal my very first research paper on “The Contaminated Granites of Sankaridrug” was published. In spite of my request to him to be the co-author he bluntly refused – a phenomenon, extremely rare these days. He never craved for name, fame, award or reward. He guided me heavily in my doctoral venture. Besides being an academician, Prof. Rao was proficient in astrology and many used to get his guidance. In his college days he was a well-known cricketer, and was the captain of the University team. He was a lover of fine arts and even had a stint at violin.

Personally I have lost a close friend, philosopher and guide who moulded me to seek enlightenment in serving the noble cause of geological education in India. Prof. Rao is survived by his wife Smt. Kalavathy and her family to whom the whole geological community humbly conveys its heart- felt condolences.

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