BOOK REVIEW

Wedded to the Rocks: The Life and Work of Adam Sedgwick (1785-1873) by Chris Park. Published by Chris Park, 329 p (pbk), ISBN9781548851705, Price £ 7.50; Available also at www.amazon.in for Rs.1091/-(pbk)

This biographical work makes a very interesting read for anyone interested in the history of science and in particular Geology as ideas evolved in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century primarily in Europe. Adam Sedgwick is considered by many as the father of modern Geology and was the Woodwardian Professor of Geology at the Trinity College, Cambridge for a long period of 55-years (1818-1873). He played a pivotal role in the evolution of teaching of Geology as a subject at Cambridge in addition to being primarily responsible for the discovery and naming of Cambrian and Devonian systems.

It may surprise us to learn that Adam Sedgwick basically was a mathematician and also a churchman [he was a *Canon*, a church official at Norwich Cathedral]. Those days, University appointments were made on the basis of general merit of the candidate and not necessarily on the basis of specialised knowledge in a given field. Sedgwick was influenced by his belief that the field work involved in Geology would improve his “general health” and geological work would be more fruitful than being a teacher of mathematics. His being a Churchman and strong believer, brought him directly in conflict with the biblical ideas of genesis and the age and evolution of earth and life based on geological research. He tried all through his life to reconcile both by being not dogmatic by invoking concepts of induction processes to bridge the widening gulf between the gospel/biblical truths and contradicting scientific advances regarding the origin of the earth and evolution of life. Sedgwick became the President of the Geological Society of London in 1829.

He collaborated with Roderick I. Murchison, another famed geologist of his time, (who was the President of the Geological Society of London in 1831 and later Director General of the Geological Survey

of Great Britain in 1855). They worked together in Wales, Devonshire and Scotland and made comparisons with the European continent. Disagreement with Murchison on the discovery and naming of Ordovician broke their otherwise very fruitful partnership.

The book under review is authored by Chris Park, a well-known geographer and environmentalist and an Emeritus Professor at Lancaster University(U.K.). Author of many pioneering books on Environment and Ecology, Professor Park was the Director of Graduate School at Lancaster University (2001-2010). He was also actively associated with the Higher Education Authority and Quality Assurance Agencies of UK.

In a country like ours, where history of science and development of ideas has not been given its due importance, it is refreshing to read this biography of a geologist, who started his career as a theologian and mathematician and accidentally veered into geology. The history, controversies and the excitement in discovering and naming important epochs of the Palaeozoic based on paleontological, sedimentary and structural criteria is at once fascinating and absorbing. It is interesting to note that Sedgwick's training of Darwin in Wales in 1831 that laid the foundation of the Beagle expedition. Sedgwick took an active part in the creation-evolution debate of his time and tried to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable. Park has done yeoman service to the geological community in bringing out the personality of a pioneer geologist, academician and humanist.

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