NEWS AND NOTES

Foundation Day Celebrations of the Geological Society of India – N. Rajendran (Email: nrajendran49@gmail.com)

The 55th Foundation Day of the Geological Society of India was celebrated on the 28th May 2013 with a function of Book Release in the forenoon and a Group Discussion on ‘Geoparks and Geotourism’ being the theme chosen for this year, in the afternoon at its office premises at Gavipuram, Bangalore. Prof. Roddam Narasimha, JNCASR, Bangalore was the Chief Guest and Shri A. Sundaramoorthy, Director General, Geological Survey of India, Kolkata was the Guest of Honour. R.H. Sawkar, Secretary, extended a warm welcome to the chief guest and the guest of honour besides the august gathering comprising fellows and dignitaries from the GSI, DMG, AMD, CGWB, Bangalore University and other organisations. On this occasion two books – namely ‘Random Harvest: An anthology of Editorials’ by B.P. Radhakrishna and ‘Reminiscences’ a collection of articles by Fellows and associates of BPR, were released by Prof. Narasimha. In his address, Prof. Roddam Narasimha recalled his early acquaintance with late BPR as a messenger for numerous letters from his father, a Professor of Physics at the Central College, Bangalore, to BPR as they were very close friends. He recalled the close scientific link and interaction with BPR when he was a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee that was constituted to advice the Government on the constitution of the new ministry on Earth Science, its objective and mandate. He also recalled that BPR was very firm in his conviction that the whole gamut of earth sciences must come under one roof. Prof. Narasimha further recalled that he enjoyed reading BPR’s Kannada book on Ramanujam, the world renowned mathematician, and such vernacular texts bring in the nuances so unique to Indian contexts compared to books by English authors. Narasimha described BPR as a Karma Yogi and a person of great integrity, humility and simplicity. Shri Sundaramoorthy, complimented the Society for its numerous endeavours to enrich and nourish earth sciences in India achieved under the guidance of a visionary like Dr. B.P. Radhakrishna. He also outlined the efforts being made by the GSI to maintain and develop Geological museums, parks and monuments and allocation of funds (Rs. 50 lakhs) for such purposes during the year, 2013-14. He also informed of the development of an ammonite fossil park in the Cretaceous rocks of Tamil Nadu and the Warkali beds in Kerala as geological monuments. He requested the Society to join hands with the GSI in planning and execution of the forthcoming IGC-2020 in New Delhi. In this regard, he mentioned the establishment of three Centres of Excellence with state of the art facilities to carry out research in earth science at Bangalore, Faridabad and Kolkata. S.V. Srikantia, Vice President, in his concluding remarks, recalled that the editorials of BPR were on issues of national importance and were forthright, thought provoking and positive with new ideas. He thanked Prof. Roddam Narasimha and A. Sundaramoorthy for gracing the occasion and participating in the Foundation Day function in spite of their busy schedule. He also expressed thanks to all the participants from different Central and State Government Departments as well as Fellows of the Society for making the function a great success.

GROUP DISCUSSION ON ‘GEOPARKS AND GEOTOURISM’

The afternoon session was entirely devoted for the Group Discussion on ‘Geoparks and Geotourism’. The session was chaired by noted environmentalist, Shri Y.N. Yellappa Reddy. K.S. Godavari, Secretary, welcomed the Chairman, speakers and delegates. S.V. Srikantia, introduced the theme of the topic. In his presentation, he highlighted the diversity of landscapes of India with photographs of geological, tectonic and geomorphic features from Karakoram in the north to Kanyakumari in the south; snow clad Kanchenjunga of the Great Himalaya to the coastal plains of Peninsular India; the lone active volcano of Barren Island; and the scenic blue range of mountains of west coast of India. He pointed out that the problem today was not of the dearth of sites of geo-diversity but our will to develop them. Many other countries have developed and
showcased their landscapes by providing good roads, communication facilities, rest places, drinking water and food availability with display of history and geological map, evolution of landscape and clean environment. Why can’t we do it in India? It calls for collective action of earth scientists, local community, foresters, Central and State Government agencies, teachers, students and NGOs. He also suggested that in the first instance, the Closepet Granite, in and around the Ramadevarabetta Vulture Sanctuary may be developed as a Geopark with the cooperation of Forest Department.

P. Krishnamurthy, Geological Society of India, gave a brief definition and scope of the Geoparks and identified three potential areas for development of Geoparks, namely the Singhbhum Cu-U province, Zawar Pb-Zn mines and old workings and the relics of Zinc metallurgy of more than 2000 years old. He gave an account of the Singhbhum copper-Uranium belt, its mining history dating back to King Ashoka’s time, heritage mining sites of last century and the recent uranium mining activity through a series of photographs. He opined that the Geological Society and Geological Survey of India should take up the cause and prepare guide books for tourists and students highlighting the geological histories of temples, monuments and treks.

Satyabrata Guha of Geological Survey of India, Bangalore started his presentation with the numerous facets of Geotourism followed by a detailed account of Geoparks, and the initiative of UNESCO for supporting Global Geoparks Network (GGN), global Geoparks distribution and the Indian Scenario. He presented a brief account of some of the 26 existing geological monumets maintained by the GSI. He also mentioned about the proposed sites at Varkkala beach section, the type area of Warkalli Formation, Cretaceous marine fossil park at Karai-Kulakkannattam, and Upper Gondwana Ptilophyllum flora and petrified tree trunks at Mandro Block, Sahebganj dist, Jharkhand. He drew attention to the sites which deserve to be protected such as the dinosaur nesting site in Kheda district Gujarat, Borra caves in Vizag district, A.P., and Badami caves in Bijapur district, Karnataka. He pointed out many sites of geological interest are in imminent danger of getting lost for ever such as the beautifully preserved frog and other fossils within intertrappean and pyroclastic beds in Malabar Hills, Mumbai.

H.S.M. Prakash of Geological Survey of India, Bangalore in his presentation mentioned about the growth of global geoparks from a modest 25 in July 2004 when the first international Geopark conference was held in Beijing, to 91 by September 2012. He presented photographs of the Ramadevarabetta and its surroundings highlighting the scenic beauty of the Closepet granite terrain and its characteristic landforms and flora. He also identified Devarayanadurga in Tumkur district and Siddarabetta as other suitable sites for geoparks, apart from Komatiitic lavas with spinifex texture at Banasandra and Yana, Karnataka.

M.Venkatasonamy, Geological Survey of India gave a historical account of the mining activity in Kolar Gold Field area with vintage photographs of mining sites which need protection and preservation. He mentioned the KGF mines as “mother of mines” which contributed to mining technology to the entire country and also to the outside world. He pleaded that the KGF mine should be preserved as a Geopark.

N.Rajendran, formerly of Geological Survey of India, gave an account of the case study of areas from South Africa where a Geopark and Geotourism has been excellently developed with potential applications to some Indian contexts.

1. Pilanesberg Alkaline Ring Complex: The Circular complex of 25 km diameter represents an ancient volcanic crater of 1500 million years old with rare rock types and structure. This has been converted into an excellent geological and Eco-destination with varied fauna and flora. Presence of number of resorts including the famous Sun City along the fringe of National Park is an added attraction which brings large number of visitors making this National Park a self sustainable one.

2. Witwatersrand, Johannesberg: Nearly half of the gold ever mined was produced from this area from quartz pebble conglomerate of late Archean age. Geological Society of South Africa in association with other concerned organisations, identified more than 60 sites of geological and mining interest and arranged for their protection from the ever growing city of Johannesberg.

H.M. Ramachandra, Formerly of Geological Survey of India, made a case for Geopark hub at Chitradurga representing the best preserved and well studied typical Archaean Granite-Greenstone belt, covering thousands of km². The National Geological Monument of pillow lava at Maradihalli site is very close to Chitradurga town. Several more sites related to geomorphology, igneous and sedimentary rocks, structures and tectonics can be identified; geological trails can be defined; and hiking trips organised with Chitradurga Training Institute having very good basic infrastructure.

Prahland Iyengar, NRI, gave a brief account of some of the national Parks from US. Prabhakar and Renuka Prasad of Bangalore University and Subhagunappa of Gulbarga University also participated in the discussions that followed the presentations. The Chairman summarising the proceedings suggested that the formation of a core committee for collection of information covering various aspects such as the potential of the areas, the diversity, methodology, requirements, etc. that are needed to declare an area as a potential geopark with tourist potential. These can be presented to concerned Government departments for necessary action. The Chairman also suggested dissemination of Geotourism information through exclusive slots in Doordarshan and All India Radio. The Group Discussion concluded with formal vote of thanks to the Chair, the authors of the presentation and august gathering by K.S. Godavari.