N. Seshagiri

I have known N. Seshagiri for almost 50 years, first slightly and subsequently fairly intimately. We were Ph D degree students together at the Indian Institute of Science. After obtaining his Ph D degree, he moved to the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and then to New Delhi. His contributions to the IT revolution in India, including the founding and nurturing of the National Informatics Centre (NIC) are very well known. Less well known are his contributions to other areas of science, including biophysics and structural biology.

In addition to his personal contributions, he has been, among other things, a great supporter of research efforts in biophysics and structural biology, particularly macromolecular crystallography. The efforts of my colleagues and myself to initiate and develop macromolecular crystallography in India received a decisive boost when DST handsomely funded us under their Thrust Area Programme in 1983. Seshagiri was the Chairman of the relevant PAC which strongly supported our proposal. I still vividly remember the enthusiasm and commitment with which he commended the effort. Since then, he has all along been very positive in his approach to the development of macromolecular crystallography in India.

By the late eighties and the early nineties, macromolecular crystallography at Bangalore had begun to assume a reasonable shape. The bottleneck then was computational facilities, particularly interactive graphics facilities. Nowadays we take these facilities for granted. In those days we used to interpret electron density maps and prepare diagrams manually. The graphics facility of choice then was the Evans and Sutherland system manufactured in the United States. On account of the several sanctions that then existed, the company would not even send us a quotation. Happily by that time Silicon Graphics got established. From my colleagues abroad I learnt that it was a good system. However we did not have the funds, especially foreign exchange, to procure it. It was then that Seshagiri came to our rescue again. He was then the Chairman of the Bioinformatics Task Force of the newly established Department of Biotechnology (DBT). On the recommendation of the task force, an Interactive Graphics Facility was granted to us. That facility has been involved in several landmarks in the development of macromolecular crystallography in the country. That also turned out to be the forerunner of several other such facilities in the country. He not only helped to grant the facility to us, but also ensured that we were provided the necessary foreign exchange to buy a state of the art Silicon Graphics machine.

What I have given above are just two examples of how Seshagiri impinged on our research efforts. Seshagiri and I have interacted fruitfully in many different ways. Through these interactions we became friends. I was moved very deeply by his passing away. I, like many many others, would sorely miss him.

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jointly with ITI for assembly and manufacture of these terminals for this purpose.

His other important and pioneering contribution was the setting up of satellite-based export processing zones in different states that helped local companies to have data communication facilities with large corporations overseas for providing software development services. This was crucial in making India a global leader in the business of outsourcing of software services.

Seshagiri was the recipient of various awards, including the prestigious Padmabhushan Award, Asiad Jyothi Award, Om Prakash Bhasin Award and Karnataka Rajyostava Award. He was elected to the fellowship of the two national science Academies of the country (IASc, Bangalore in 1974; NASI, Allahabad in 1988) and the Indian Academy of Engineering (1998).

I had the fortune of working closely with him at TIFR and shared an office room for some time. We used to have interesting discussions and ideas on various issues like strategies in dealing with enemies, adversaries and competition. He used to speak about the *Mandukyopanishad* and its contribution to logic. A keen practitioner of yoga, he even carried out a very impressive demo. We also worked on the problem (more like a puzzle) of designing pure RC networks (without any active element, not even a diode) that provided some significant voltage 'gain'. He frequently used to speak about his ideas and attempts at discovering possible relationships among relativity, gravity and quantum theory. Though not quite a builder of systems, he was one of the very few who understood and appreciated the importance of technology and manufacturing industry. A great thinker and analyst, he was one of the brightest scientists that I came across and used to wonder about the possibility of great research contributions he would have made had he continued his work at TIFR. His national level contributions were no doubt outstanding and exceptional.

His death is a great loss for electronics technology development in India. In his passing, India has lost a pioneer who steered the IT act for Government of India and set up the NICNET – the nationwide data network – which has been the IT backbone of Government of India.

He passed away on 26 May 2013 and leaves behind his wife, a son, a daughter and two grand children.

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