

PERSONAL NEWS

I was delighted to read in *Europhysics News* the obituary notice reproduced below, about an Indian physicist whose name is virtually unknown to the present generation of scientists in our country. The authors of this beautiful recollection clearly knew very little of his history before he entered their world, and it is the period after this that they have written about, and with such sensitive appreciation.

Chandru and I were good friends since the late forties, when I was a student in Central College, Bangalore and he was in the physics department, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, where I had many friends, and often hung around. The students of Raman's group of that epoch were a powerful lot, many of whom became famous names in physics in India and the world. They were all deeply interested in what they were doing and spent a lot of time discussing their work with each other. I remember listening (quietly) to many of these discussions on difficult questions requiring a deep knowledge of physics to resolve. And the most enduring recollection is that it was always Chandru, the youngest, who understood first, and explained it all beautifully to the others.

It is therefore with great joy that I read how highly he was regarded and loved by those who only knew him years later.

V. RADHAKRISHNAN

*Raman Research Institute, CV Raman Avenue,
Bangalore 560 080, India; e-mail: rad@rri.res.in*

Venkataraman Chandrasekharan (1925–2003)*



Dr Venkataraman Chandrasekharan Directeur de Recherches au CNRS, passed away on 5 September 2003 at the age of 78. His students and colleagues regret the loss of a great scientist and a multifaceted, warm and demonstrative person.

Chandra (as we called him) was a pure product of the Southern Indian school of Physics that counted prestigious names such as S. Chandrasekhar, R. S. Krishnan and C. V. Raman.

His thesis was on light scattering of diamond and quartz. After completing it, he left for the United States and worked in Eugene, Oregon. At the beginning of the 1960s, he met Boris Vodar who offered him a position at the CNRS Labo-

ratoire des Hautes Pressions in Bellevue, near Paris (later to become Laboratoire des Interactions Moléculaires et des Hautes Pressions). Two years later he became a staff scientist at the CNRS, and later on Directeur de Recherches.

His scientific activity knew no boundaries and he worked on scattering spectroscopies (Raman, Rayleigh), as well as IR, Raman and Vacuum-ultraviolet spectroscopy of gas phase and condensed phase molecular systems, with a penchant for theoretical aspects. He was also a pioneer of computer simulations of dynamical properties of molecular crystals and solids. He stayed with the CNRS until he retired in 1991.

For anyone who met him, Chandra had all the traits of a genius. A vast scientific culture with an incredible physical insight, a wealth of ideas, and an acute curiosity for physical problems, matched with an intellectually rigorous and demanding character. As is often the case with such brilliant, high calibre individuals, he also had a complex personality: temperamental, sincere, sometimes tormented, with a deep love of life and an incredible sense of humour. When asked why he had settled in France, he would reply that it was because of French cuisine.

He once gave a talk, and at the moment he finished it, an alarm clock, which was

in his bag, went off. He stopped it and told the audience 'that was to wake you up', alluding to the Institute Head, who tended to sleep at seminars. This anecdote shows Chandra's special dislike of authority (be it political, religious or otherwise), and he never hesitated to provoke the scientific establishment of CNRS by his statements and criticisms.

Nothing expresses better his contemplation of life and of what lies beyond, than the poem we reproduce below, which he wrote when he retired from CNRS. It was read at his cremation. May his soul rest in Peace.

*Let me but live my life from year to year
With forward face and unreluctant soul
Not hurrying to, nor turning from the goal,
Nor mourning for the things that disappear
In the dim past, nor holding back in fear
From what the future veils, but with a whole
And happy heart, that pays its toll
To youth and age, and travels on with cheer,
So let the way be up the hill or down
O'er rough or smooth, the journey will be joy,
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy
New friendship, high endeavour and a crown
My heart will keep the courage of the quest
And hope the road's last turn will be the best.*

M. CHERGUI
M.-M. THIÉRY
B. SILVI

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