

D N Wadia

A giant among geologists, Darashaw Noshawan Wadia was a great visionary who not only shaped our understanding of the geological making of the Indian subcontinent but also set the national agenda of geological activities when India won freedom. He was a towering personality, building and helping build institutions of excellence, and guiding the affairs of a multitude of science societies and organizations, including the Indian National Science Academy (as its President in 1945-1946), and the International Geological Congress (as its President during 1960-1964). A man of extraordinary talent for organization and management, D N Wadia was the founder Director of the Indian Bureau of Mines (1947), the Atomic Minerals Division (1949-1969), and the Institute of Himalayan Geology (1968-1969). He was intimately associated with the establishment and running of such internationally reputed institutions as the National Geophysical Research Institute (Hyderabad) and the National Institute of Oceanography (Goa). The Institute of Himalayan Geology, which he founded, now named Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, is a monumental testimony to Wadia's great vision.

Born on October 23, 1883 at Surat in Gujarat in a Parsee family of erstwhile shipbuilders, Darashaw was one of the nine children of a Railway Station Master. He took his BSc degree from the Baroda College in 1905, and in the following year was appointed a lecturer in geology at the Prince of Wales College, Jammu, in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. His command of English was so good that he regularly taught English to the students of his college. He used to take his students on adventure trekking and investigative field trips in the Siwalik Hills of the

Jammu region. It was in one of these ventures that he discovered a 3 metre long fossil tusk of an elephantine mammal *Stegodon ganesa*, a finding of crucial import. He pursued his personal research on stratigraphy, structure and palaeontology of the Kashmir Himalaya with single-minded devotion. Having a very keen eye for observation, he worked towards identification of broad structural elements of the NW Himalaya. The erudite book he wrote – *The Geology of India* – published in 1919 by the Macmillans, London, distils his vast and intimate knowledge of the geology of the entire Indian subcontinent, embracing Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. This classical work, which had six editions, made him not only a celebrity but also a *guru* of countless generations of students of geology all over the world.

Having served as a geology and English teacher for 14 years, the 38 year old D N Wadia joined the Geological Survey of India in 1921, and carried out with dogged perseverance and unremitting vigour his studies in NW Punjab and the then princely states of Kashmir, Hazara, Waziristan and Gilgit. This work led to publications of his benchmark monographs and papers on the novel concept of and evidence for the entire Himalaya mountain system with its terranes, faults and rock-formations bending sharply – like a knee-bend – southwards around the pivot of the mountain knot called Nanga Parbat. The explanation Wadia provided for the spectacular 'knee-bend' development as a consequence of the mountain ranges curving acutely around the northward jutting piece of land of the Indian subcontinent brought him the *Lyell Medal* of the Geological Society of London, the *Leopold von Buch Award*



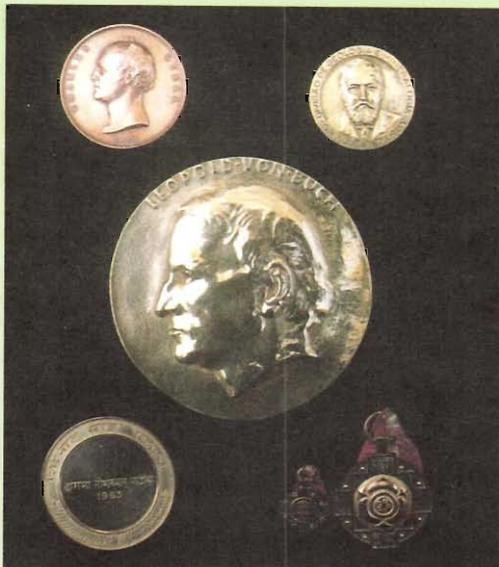


Figure 1. Prestigious medals awarded to Dr D N Wadia include Charles Lyell, *Divisao de Geologia e Minerologia*, Leopold von Buch, Meghnad Saha and Padma Bhushan.

of the Geological Society of Germany, the *Fellowship of the Royal Society of London* (FRS), and many national awards.

Retiring from the Geological Survey of India in 1938, he served for six years as the Mineralogist to the Sri Lankan Government when he studied the unique geology of an island in the stable continental region. In 1945 he was appointed the



Figure 2. Dr D N Wadia with President of India Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan at the International Geological Congress, 1964.



Figure 3. Dr D N Wadia with Sir Evans, FRS in a field excursion in Oxford (1946).

Geological Advisor to the national government of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. This was the beginning of his leading role in the affairs of the nation – as a great institution builder, an ardent formulator and advocate of a national policy for the search, utilization and conservation of mineral resources (including oil, gas and water) and as a forward-looking, inspiring steward of a multitude of associations related to earthscience. The nation recognized Wadia's services and the value of his creative contributions by conferring on him the award of *Padma Bhushan*, the position of *National Professor of Geology*, the *Meghnad Saha Medal*, the *P N Bose Memorial Medal*, and so on. On June 15, 1969 at the age of 86 he died in harness, leaving behind his intensely caring and loving wife Meher Wadia.

A person of somewhat retiring disposition and shunning limelight, D N Wadia devoted himself wholly to the causes he espoused. Caring little for mundane things, he lived a simple but extremely punctual life in which there was no place for rest.

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