

## Good Times in Tübingen

Wolfgang Engelmann



*Time in the Living World*  
**M K Chandrashekar**  
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I was delighted when the editor of *Resonance* requested me to review the book *Time in the Living World* by M K Chandrashekar for the journal, of which MKC was the Chief Editor till December 2005. I am glad that Professor Rao encouraged him successfully to write this book, which is an educational monograph addressing the needs of students and the teaching and research community. I enjoyed reading it, especially the seventh chapter 'Looking back'.

Scientists are a privileged group of people: They can choose a topic of their own and do research on it. Furthermore, they can discuss their work with co-scientists and publish the results, thus contributing to the ever increasing knowledge of mankind. Their teaching usually attracts students to join them in their quest to 'find out' the mysteries of nature. Often this research is of no immediate use for the society, but might well prove to be beneficial in the future. A country investing in science and scientists might not be rewarded immediately by the results, but the increase in knowledge and understanding will pay off

in the long run. Take the example of radio waves studied by Hertz for purely theoretical reasons at the time. He could not have even imagined about the significant role it will play in communications in the future.

Scientists and their work are supported by the public. It should therefore be an obligation on the part of scientists to tell people what they do. In this respect, the educational monographs brought out by the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre are a timely and valuable series. The book by MKC is a combination of the scientific work of the author and an outline of his scientific career. For the student and interested layperson, the introduction to the author's special field of biological rhythms is probably the most attractive part. For me as a referee of the book, colleague and friend, it is the last chapter, the looking back, which I found most interesting and touching.

I met MKC or Shekhar, as we used to call him for short, for the first time in Tübingen at the end of 1964, while I was working on circadian rhythms in plants and insects. It must have been a hard time for him to spend his first winter in Germany, struggling with the Swabian dialect of the South Germans. A few years later, he would say at the Max Planck Institute in Erling Andechs when Klaus Hofmann made fun of the Swabians, "*What do you have against us Swabians!*"! He was liked very much by the colleagues in the department, the secretary, assistants and students because of his friendliness, open mind and the generous time he devoted to others. Soon he was the person to approach if

a paper had to be written in English. Bünning, the Ordinarius in Plant Physiology, took advantage of his excellent English knowledge and style at each publication and would acknowledge this of course.

I was lucky to have Shekar work in my group for quite some time on the eclosion rhythm in fruit-flies. Shekar in his gentle, kind and thoughtful ways helped the students to get familiar with the methods, recording devices, and literature. More importantly, he conveyed his enthusiasm for this field to them. He impressed them with his experimental skill and his sharp thinking. Even today, if I meet former students or colleagues of that time, one of their first questions is 'have you heard from Shekar and how is he doing'?

The scientific part of the book reflects the scientific career of Shekar and at the same time gives a nice introduction into the field of biological rhythms. He starts with tidal rhythms, which he stumbled upon by accident while studying respiration in crabs at the University of Madras (*"The true worth of an experimenter consists in pursuing not only what he seeks, but also what he did not seek"*, the motto he quotes on top of the Tidal and Lunar Rhythm chapter). In Tübingen he would continue this work for some time, but switch to *Drosophila* rhythm which I had started. He continued to work with rhythms on *Drosophila* and grasshoppers when he went

to Berkeley in California. He developed his full potential in teaching and research when he went back to India where he was able to create a very efficient group of excellent scientists at the newly founded Madurai Kamaraj University in Southern India. Rhythms of bats, field mice and even humans were the objects of studies and the details of the results are nicely outlined in the five chapters (two to six) of the book.

One of my most impressive meetings was the Biological Oscillations Workshop in Madurai, which Shekar and his group had very well organized in December 1978. This was also my first visit to India. I remember the excursion to the nearby bat caves and the announcement of Marimuthu that in two or three minutes the bats would fly out, and sure enough, there they came, by the hundreds.

My last visit to India was in 1990. Shekar was at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR) in Bangalore. In contrast to Madurai, he was more relaxed. We could talk in length about his and my work and I learned a lot from him and his colleagues, those in his own group as well as those at the JNCASR. Many thanks for a long collaboration and good friendship!

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Wolfgang Engelmann, Department of Botany, University of Tübingen, Germany. Email: engelmann@uni-tuebingen.de

