



Professor (Mrs.) V.A. Janaki
(1918-2002)

Mrs. Vengalil Achyutha Menon Janaki Sethna, better known as Prof. V.A. Janaki, was one of those young geographers of India, who were entrusted with the task of starting and building new Departments of Geography in the country, at the dawn of Independence.

Born at Calicut on 25th March 1918, Mrs. Janaki completed her graduate and post-graduate studies from Presidency College, Madras. She then proceeded to England and obtained her B.Litt. degree from the University of Oxford. She was invited by the first Vice-Chancellor of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda to establish and develop a Department of Geography in the University.

Mrs. Janaki joined The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda as a Senior Lecturer in Geography in 1952. Subsequently, she was promoted to the posts of Reader (1957), Professor (1963) and Senior Professor (1974), and remained at the helm of the department as its Head as long as she continued working as a faculty member in the university. She retired from the University service on 31st March 1978. After retirement, she was nominated as U.G.C. Professor in the department and continued to work in that capacity till 1981.

During the first few years of her joining the University, Janaki married Professor Suresh M. Sethna, a Professor of Chemistry and subsequently the Pro Vice-Chancellor in the same university. The couple lived on the university campus, and was closely associated with the academic and cultural life of the university. Either in the development of geography or in the pursuit of her other interests, Janaki leaned heavily on the advice and support of Dr. Sethna who was known for his scholarship and

integrity. Dr. Sethna died a few years before her death.

During her twenty-seven years of service in the university, she introduced both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes and developed unparalleled infrastructural facilities for them. Her efforts made the Department a premier Geography Department in the country. Prof. Janaki was not only known for her excellent teaching abilities and administrative capabilities but also for her vast research contributions in the fields of Historical Geography, Political Geography and Economic Geography. She had attended six seminars of National and International levels and published nine detailed monographs, 24 research articles/papers in various geographical journals and magazines, 27 geographical articles for the Encyclopaedia Britannica and two chapters on physical geography of Jamnagar and Bhavnagar for the District Gazetteers of Gujarat. She supervised two Ph.D. and 56 M.A./M.Sc. dissertations. The Royal Geographical Society, London, of which she was an Elected Fellow and the American Geographical Society of which she was a Fellow till 1967 also recognised her scholarship.

Prof. Janaki was an amiable person with a pleasant personality and a liberal outlook to life. Good to her students and colleagues alike, she treated them with respect and care. Besides geography, she was interested in art, literature and music. She passed away peacefully in the afternoon of 7th February 2002 at Baroda, in her own house.

The geography faculty of the M.S. University, Baroda, especially those who were associated with her as her colleagues will always remember her not only for her contribution to geography but for the dedication with which she developed the department of geography in the university. The Department of Geography, M.S. University Baroda deeply mourns her death.

Niladri Ranjan Dash
M.S. University, Baroda.