CONFERENCE ON CARBONATITES AND ASSOCIATED ALKALINE ROCKS OF TAMIL NADU

Carbonatites are a rare group of igneous rocks of mantle origin and are well known for their LREE and Nb resources. In fact, production in single deposits like the Bayan Obo in China (LREE) and Araxa in Brazil (Nioblium) control the entire world market for these metals. The present conference in Southern India almost after 2½ decades, organized by the Department of Geology, University of Madras, Guindy Campus, Chennai between 12 and 18 February, 2001 is most welcome and timely. The conference notably evaluated the present status of carbonatites and associated alkaline rocks of northern Tamil Nadu, besides new work on other complexes from India, China, Mexico, Czech Republic and Sri Lanka. It also provided an opportunity for delegates to participate in the field trip and visit some of the well known carbonatite and/or syenite complexes of Tamil Nadu, such as Sevattur, Samalpatti, Elagiri and Pakkanadu. The conference was inaugurated by Sripathi, Chairman, TAMIN. Viladkar of St. Xaviers' College, Mumbai, who was the Chairman of the Organising Committee, gave a brief account of the genesis of the conference. V. Ram Mohan, Department of Geology, Madras University was the co-ordinator of the symposium. Viladkar, R.N. Dey, V. Subramanian spoke at the inaugural session. Twenty papers were presented in the conference divided into six sessions.

The main topics covered by the seminar include geology, geochemistry and airborne and ground geophysics of the carbonatite complexes of Tamil Nadu, including the alkaline carbonatites, shonkinites and lamprophyres; integrated exploration involving satellite imagery, regional geochemistry and airborne geophysics; collaborative research between Japanese, Indian and Russian teams on the carbonatites of India and Russia; carbonatite breccia from China, Eppawala carbonatites of Sri Lanka, alkaline volcanism in Mexico, alkaline carbonatites of Bohemian massif, felspathoidal plutons of Prakasam alkaline province and nephelinites of Ambadongar; nitrogen as tracer to the carbonatitic magma source; and secular variation in the carbonatites of Tamil Nadu and Southern Asia.

It was emphasized that carbonatite research in India and notably in Tamil Nadu should be intensified considering the economic potential of these complexes for rare metals and rare elements.

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NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON TEACHER EDUCATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL MAGNETISM

Environmental magnetism is an important and up-coming discipline that has developed considerably during the past two decades. It has been gainfully used in placer mineral exploration; understanding past climatic changes; surface processes; sediment movement in harbours and beaches; river-bed sediment transport; environmental pollution; and impact of anthropogenic activities. Environmental magnetic methods are simple, rapid, inexpensive and non-destructive. Because of these merits, frontline research and developmental work in environmental magnetism has been carried out elsewhere in the world. However, efforts to use environmental magnetic techniques in India are limited, probably because scientists are not fully aware of this fascinating discipline.

The Ocean Science and Technology Cell (OSTC), in collaboration with Association of British Scholars, Mangalore Centre, organized the first "Workshop on Environmental Magnetism" for ten days from 9th to 18th February 2001. About 13 teachers from different universities/colleges participated in the workshop, which was inaugurated by B.L.K. Somayajulu and presided over by S. Gopal, Vice-Chancellor, Mangalore University.

The workshop was conducted by Prof. F. Oldfield who is a pioneer in environmental magnetism. In the morning session, he delivered lectures on the principles of environmental magnetism and its application in earth, atmospheric and ocean sciences, with case histories.