

Beyond the rocks: the life and legacy of Emeritus Professor C.B. Dissanayake

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The late Emeritus Professor C.B. Dissanayake stands among Sri Lanka's most distinguished scientists, a pioneer in geology whose influence extended far beyond the classroom and laboratory. Yet, behind the academic titles and global recognition, he was a man deeply devoted to family, community, and the pursuit of knowledge. He was not only a towering figure in geology but also a gentle, generous soul whose life touched countless others in quiet, meaningful ways. Professor C.B. Dissanayake will be remembered not just for his remarkable scientific achievements but for the warmth and humanity that defined him.

Born on January 8, 1944, in Kurunegala, his journey began with promise and purpose. Educated at Trinity College, Kandy, he entered the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya Campus, in 1964, where his academic brilliance quickly became evident. Initially trained in chemistry, he later followed his true calling in geology, becoming

the first student to graduate with a First Class Honours degree in Geology in Sri Lanka. It was an early sign of a life destined for excellence, marking the beginning of a remarkable journey in earth sciences. His academic pursuits took him to the University of Oxford, where he earned his Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil) in geochemistry. In 1991, Oxford further recognised his exceptional contributions by awarding him the prestigious Doctor of Science (DSc) degree for his work in applied geochemistry, particularly in environmental and hydrogeochemistry.

Professor Dissanayake's professional life was closely tied to the University of Peradeniya, where he served with distinction as a Lecturer, Researcher, Professor, and eventually Head, and Emeritus Professor of the Department of Geology. Over the decades, he mentored generations of students while advancing research that brought international attention to Sri Lankan geology.

His work spanned environmental geochemistry, medical geology, groundwater studies, and mineral resources of Sri Lanka. Importantly, his research connected science with society, addressing issues such as water quality and its implications for human health. With more than 200 publications in international journals and numerous books to his name, Professor Dissanayake's scholarly contributions are both extensive and influential. He presented over 100 research papers at conferences worldwide, firmly establishing Sri Lanka on the global geoscience map. His research explored diverse areas, including groundwater geochemistry and disease, the origins of graphite, gemstones, and gold deposits. His work not only advanced scientific understanding but also had tangible societal benefits. His remarkable contributions included the Hydrogeochemical Atlas of Sri Lanka, published by the National Science Foundation (then NARESA), and *Introduction to Medical Geology*, published by Springer, Germany. In addition, he

had authored several books related to Sri Lanka's mineral resources, particularly the gem resources.

At home, Professor Dissanayake was a loving husband and father who placed great importance on family life. Despite the demands of an illustrious career, he remained closely connected to his wife and daughters, nurturing a warm, curious, and learning environment. Those who knew him personally often recall his generosity, kindness, and ease at bringing people together. Whether among colleagues, students, or friends, he was known for his hospitality and genuine human connection. Yet he carried his achievements lightly, never allowing recognition to overshadow his humility.

Yet, despite these global accolades, he remained deeply rooted in Sri Lanka, dedicating his life to advancing knowledge and nurturing young minds at the University of Peradeniya. For decades, Professor Dissanayake also served as the Director of the National Institute of Fundamental Studies (NIFS) in Kandy several times. Many generations of students remember him not only for his intellect but also for his ability to inspire, making science come alive with relevance and purpose. He believed that knowledge should serve society, and his work reflected this conviction.

His engagement with society was equally remarkable. He played an active role in organisations such as the Lions Club of Kandy, and

the Alliance Française de Kandy, contributing to charitable and cultural initiatives. He also held several leadership roles, including President of the Geological Society of Sri Lanka, and contributed actively to scientific and community organisations. His leadership helped elevate both scientific research and public awareness in the country.

In recognition of his immense contributions, Professor Dissanayake received numerous accolades, including the Vidya Jyothi, Sri Lanka's highest national honour for scientific achievement. He was also awarded honorary Doctor of Science degrees by the University of Peradeniya and the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. These honours reflect not just his academic excellence, but the lasting impact of his dedicated work on science and society. In addition, he received many awards and fellowships. Among these are the fellowships from Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany; World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), Italy; and the National Academy of Sciences, Sri Lanka.

Professor C.B. Dissanayake's legacy lies not only in his scientific achievements but also in the way he lived, with integrity, generosity, and purpose. His contributions continue to shape geology in Sri Lanka and beyond, while his personal values remain an enduring example for all.

He may no longer walk among us, but his influence, like the very

earth he studied, remains deeply embedded and ever enduring. Professor Dissanayake's life is a powerful reminder of what it means to live with purpose. He pursued excellence not for personal gain, but for the betterment of others. He gave freely of his knowledge, time, and kindness, and in doing so, he left behind a legacy that will endure far beyond his years. As we bid farewell, we remember a scholar of great distinction, a teacher of lasting influence, and above all, a human being of exceptional grace. His absence will be deeply felt, but his spirit will continue to inspire quietly, steadily, and profoundly.

He may be gone, but the light of his soul remains.



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