

Pisharoth Raman Pisharoty

'In the ninety-three years that he graced this earth, Prof. Pisharoty enriched the world in many ways by his original way of life throughout his varied and active career. Prof. Pisharoty was a saint among scientists. While pursuing excellence in modern scientific research, Prof. Pisharoty was firmly rooted in tradition and achieved an integration of the ancient wisdom of the land with modern science in his thinking. He has been a fatherly figure and was ever willing to listen and offer his advice.'

This is an extract from all of the messages that poured in following the death of Pisharoty. There can be no tribute truer than this to a man who contributed so much to atmospheric sciences and towards research and education in remote sensing in this country. A doyen of Indian meteorology, Pisharoty passed away on 24 September 2002 in Pune. He is survived by two daughters and a son.

Born in Kollengode, Kerala on 10 February 1909, Pisharoty had his early education in Kerala, Madras (now Chennai) and Bangalore. He worked as a college lecturer in physics in Madras during 1932–41. His urge for science was so great that he spent the summers as a vacation worker under C. V. Raman at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. He joined the India Meteorological Department in 1942. While adding his name to the short list of candidates recommended to the meteorology department at the request of the then Director of Observatories, Raman noted 'I would include Mr Pisharoty in a short list of ablest men I have ever had working with me. His personal and intellectual qualities are such as to enable him successfully to undertake the highest type of scientific and administrative work'. Pisharoty lived up to his guru's evaluation. He worked hard to get to grips with the science of meteorology and weather forecasting, and carried out front-rank research on thunderstorms, western disturbances, movement of monsoon depressions, orographic rain, etc. He was deputed to the University of California, Los Angeles where he worked with the renowned meteorologist V. Bjerknes. He brought out two notable reports 'Some aspects of geostrophic poleward sensible heat' and 'The kinetic energy of the atmosphere' and was awarded MS and

Ph D degrees in record time. It was during this time that he got his promotion deferred in order to continue his research work – something quite unheard of in a government department.

On his return to India, Pisharoty held several important positions one after another. He became the Director of Colaba and Alibag Magnetic Observatories in 1959 and Founder Director of the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune in 1962. This institute provided an impetus for research and training in atmospheric physics at a number of Indian universities, including IITs. Pisharoty was also closely associated with the highly successful International Indian Ocean Expedition in the sixties.



He retired from government service in 1967 and almost immediately joined the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) as professor, accepting the offer made by the then Director of PRL, Vikram Sarabhai. A year later he was entrusted with the job of introducing remote sensing technology to India. He created an awareness regarding this technology among politicians, science administrators and others. He led a team of scientists to USA where remote sensing was being applied to agriculture, forestry, hydrology, oceanography, geology, etc. Soon after his return, Pisharoty organized the first successful mission of coconut wilt-root disease eradication by remote sensing techniques using Soviet aircraft and US equipment, but Indian scientists. He believed that one can get anything good

done in India, if one is not anxious to get the sole credit for it – a brief we can all put into practice. In ISRO (Indian Space Research Organization), people regard him as the father of remote sensing. As the Director of Remote Sensing and Satellite Technology, Ahmedabad during 1972–76, he laid a lasting foundation for remote sensing technology in India. He continued to work at PRL till the early nineties, and for a number of years shared his office with K. R. Ramanathan – his guru and close friend.

Pisharoty had a sharp memory for varied meteorological information of significance. His clarity of thought and effectiveness in speaking ensured that he was a great force in national and international committees. If he began debating for a project, one could be sure that his recommendation would be approved. A Sanskrit scholar, he could cite the most appropriate Sanskrit sloka in any meeting, be it an international scientific conference or a social function, and instantaneously translate it into chaste English.

Pisharoty was widely recognized nationally and internationally for his contributions to meteorology, research and education. He was a Member of the Scientific Advisory Board of World Meteorological Organization (WMO) (1963–68) and later its Chairman. He was Vice-President of the International Association of Meteorology and Atmospheric Sciences and was awarded the IMO Prize by WMO. He was elected a Fellow of the Indian Academy of Sciences (1957) and a Fellow of the Indian National Science Academy (1978). He was the first recipient of the Raman Centenary Medal and the INSA K.R. Ramanathan Medal. He was honoured with Padmashree by the Government of India in 1970.

In his death the country has truly lost one of its highly disciplined stalwarts whose thinking successfully blended modern science with traditional wisdom. To all people whose lives he touched, the loss is irreparable.

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