



***M. K. Vainu Bappu***

**M. K. Vainu Bappu (1927-1982)**

Manali Kallat Vainu Bappu was born on August 10, 1927 to a senior astronomer in the Nizamiah Observatory, Hyderabad. A brilliant student throughout, Vainu Bappu not only excelled in studies but took active part in debates, sports and other extra curricular activities. However, astronomy to which he was exposed from an early age, became his passion. Being a keen amateur astronomer, even as an undergraduate, he had published papers on variable star observations. After obtaining his Masters degree in Physics from Madras University, Vainu Bappu joined the prestigious Harvard University on a scholarship.

Within a few months of his arrival at Harvard, Vainu Bappu discovered a comet. This comet was named Bappu-Bok-Newkirk, after Bappu and his colleagues Bart Bok and Gordon Newkirk who worked out the details of this comet. He completed his Ph.D. in 1952 and joined the Palomar observatory on the prestigious Carnegie Fellowship. There, he and Colin Wilson discovered a relationship between the luminosity of particular kinds of stars and some of their spectral characteristics. This important observation came to be known as the Bappu-Wilson effect and is used to determine the luminosity and distance of these kind of stars.

He returned to India in 1953 and largely through his efforts, he set up the Uttar Pradesh State Observatory in Nainital. In 1960 he left Nainital to take over as the Director of the Kodaikanal Observatory. He modernised the facilities there and it is today an active centre of astronomical research. He however realised that the Kodaikanal Observatory was inadequate for making stellar observations and started searching for a good site for a stellar observatory. As a result of his efforts, a totally indigenous 2.3 meter telescope was designed, fabricated and installed in Kavalur, Tamil Nadu. Both the telescope and the observatory were named after him when it was commissioned in 1986.

He was awarded the Donhoe Comet-Medal (1949) by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, elected as Honorary Foreign Fellow of the Belgium Academy of Sciences and was an Honorary Member of the American Astronomical Society. He was elected President of the International Astronomical Union in 1979.

