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### In Memoriam

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## In Memoriam



### Sukant K. Tripathy (1952–2000)

This special issue is dedicated to the memory of a dear friend, mentor, teacher, colleague, scientific pioneer, role model and source of inspiration, the Late Professor Sukant Tripathy. Sukant was a renowned researcher, founding director of the Center for Advanced Materials and former University Provost and Vice Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Sukant was an inspiring force to many of his friends and colleagues in the Material Science community throughout the world. His life was cut short by a tragic swimming accident on December 12, 2000 in Hawaii, while he was there for an international conference.

It has been an honor and a privilege for me to have known and worked with Sukant for over 21 years. I grew up professionally with Sukant, and during that time he played many important roles in my life ranging from mentor, colleague and most importantly, friend. To try to put in words just how special Sukant was to all that were fortunate enough to have



known him is impossible. What I hope to share here are just a few personal qualities of Sukant's, and memories of mine that illustrate the truly exceptional ways that he was able to make all our lives better for knowing him.

**A Teacher, Mentor and Advisor.** I was fortunate enough to be Sukant's first graduate student at the University of Massachusetts—Lowell in 1987. In a short amount of time, Sukant expanded his group from one empty, dusty lab and a few wide-eyed graduate students to what he has left us today, a dynamic, world class research group. He always led by example and made sure he was accessible to anyone who needed him. In all my years with him there was not one time that he said he was too busy to talk. I always found this quite incredible considering the vast number of things that he always had going on at one time. Whenever you peeked your head in his door, he would always stop whatever he was doing, welcome you into his office with a cheerful greeting such as "What's new and exciting" and immediately make you feel like you were the most important person to him at that moment. He took great pride in all of his students and in making sure that each left the university as an independent thinker and achiever. His efforts continue to show that today, as many of his past students are now leading scientists in academia, industry and government all over the world and are now carrying on his legacy.

**A Renaissance Man.** Sukant was a man with an insatiable appetite to learn about anything and everything. It seemed that he could expertly converse and engage anyone on any topic such as the arts, music, literature, philosophy, architecture, gardening and religion, to name just a few. There never seemed to be a subject that he was not knowledgeable in. Amazed at this, I would often try to catch him on something that I thought he wasn't so interested in. For example, I am a passionate Red Sox fan and I thought that this perhaps was a vulnerable subject for him, so I would often quiz him on the latest baseball news. With a twinkle in his eye, he would always give me the right answer and then usually stump me with something that I didn't know. So aside from his own areas of training and expertise, of which there was no one better to talk to, Sukant was someone you could always learn from in just everyday conversations.

**A Scientist, Pioneer and Humanitarian.** His amazing enthusiasm for all research was contagious and he had an unbelievable ability to bring together a cohesive group of all the right people and see the big picture. Sukant was a pioneer in the broad areas of electronic and photonic polymers. He and co-workers at GTE Laboratories were the first to demonstrate third-order nonlinear optical phenomenon, surface plasmon coupling, non-linear spectroscopy and surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy in mono- and multiplayer diacetylene films. As a Professor at the University of Massachusetts—Lowell since 1987, he greatly expanded the scope of the University's research in polymeric, optical, electronic and biomolecular materials. Recent work had included the use of molecular assembly techniques to fabricate multilayer assemblies of photodynamic proteins for signal transduction, molecular detection and biosensing, and surface relief gratings. His contributions have been widely recognized by many professional honors and awards. As a young scholar, Sukant was named by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences as an Outstanding Young Scientist and selected to be a national representative at the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry meeting in Lyon, France. In 1993, the ACS awarded Sukant its Carl S. Marvel Creative Polymer Chemistry Award and he was also invited to serve as an advisor to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center for the design of an organic materials processing laboratory in space. Most recently, he had received the Francis Cabot Lowell Faculty Award at the University of Massachusetts—Lowell.



Sukant's research expertise was so broad that he seemed to know everything in science under the sun . . . he even knew all about the sun, so to speak. Our latest program was to develop flexible and inexpensive photovoltaics. Only a year and a half into the program, with Sukant's leadership and vision, great progress had already been made. In all the years I have been doing research with Sukant, I had never seen him so happy and excited about a particular program. This was not because he wanted any fame or fortune out of it, but simply because he saw it as an opportunity to be able to help and provide affordable power to those throughout the world who were less fortunate. He wanted to make a difference. That difference is now being realized as it was this early work and his inspiration that has led to the formation of Konarka Technologies, Inc. (named in Sukant's memory), a world leader in the area of conformal lightweight photovoltaic devices. Sukant was a tremendous visionary, scientist, leader and humanitarian. His loss is a major one to the scientific community.

**A Friend.** I'll just end with a quick story that I'll never forget and which to me typifies what Sukant was all about. It was long ago, in my younger and more irresponsible years, and Sukant was my manager at GTE in Waltham, MA, at the time. We had a new technician starting the next day and my immediate boss was not going to be in that day and asked me to fill in for him and show the new person around. Well, the night before I went out with some friends and one thing led to another, and before I realized it we were all heading to NYC, arriving just in time to see the sunrise. Needless to say, I didn't make it into work that day. The next day, my immediate supervisor saw me, and was quite disappointed in my irresponsible behavior, as he should have been, and told me that I needed to speak to our manager, Sukant. Reluctantly, I made my way to his office, expecting to get a well-justified lecture on my lack of responsibility. I entered Sukant's office and with a serious face and tone he asked me to close the door and have a seat.

After I did so, he looked at me with a bit of a grin and said, "So did you have a good time?" I meekly replied, "Yes." He paused a moment and then said, "Well, good for you, that's what life is all about, make the most of every day, experience everything you can and then learn from those experiences. I know you and I know this won't happen again." Then with a wink of his eye he said, "Just make sure you tell your boss that I reprimanded you."

That was Sukant, and there is rarely a day that goes by that I don't think of him and try to live by those words and his example.

The articles in this Special Issue are a result of an annual memorial symposium commemorating the anniversary of his untimely death, that was attended by researchers, friends and colleagues from Universities and industries as well as former and present students and associates of the Center for Advanced Materials. The papers were presented in a symposium that was held on Friday, December 6, 2002, and included both oral and poster presentations. The symposium reflected the diverse interests of Sukant in Material Science.

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