



Comet Halley photographed on March 19, 1986 with the 20" Schmidt telescope at the Vainu Bappu Observatory, Kavalur of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics. (30 minute exposure).

## Halley disappearing after date with Sun

By Our Staff Reporter

BANGALORE, May 1. — Comet Halley is fast receding, away from vision into the depths beyond the solar system, after promptly keeping its mysterious rendezvous with the sun.

It is still visible in the evening sky through a pair of binoculars, a faint blob getting fuzzier every day. Moving in the constellation Hydra, the comet can be tracked through powerful binoculars till the first week of June. In another few months the famed comet will be lost even to giant telescopes for another 75 years.

Though the much awaited, much discussed celestial visitor did create a lot of public enthusiasm, the appearance of the fuzzily glowing milky-white ball instead of an awe-inspiring broomstick dampened the spirit considerably. However the astronomers and Halley watch groups throughout the world have collected an abundance of data, including photographs and spectra, which might help decipher the mysteries of the tailed-bodies making religious trips to the sun.

Prof. K.R. Sivaraman of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics and Chairman of the Indian Halley Observation Programme termed observations in India as "successful." "We have collected a good chunk of data," he told *Deccan Herald* here today.

Scientists at the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, Nainital observatory in Uttar Pradesh, Rangapur observatory of Osmania University and Kavalur and Kodaikanal observatories of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics have acquired a large number of photographs and spectra during

the last few months. "We are still assimilating and acquiring data," he said of this once in a life time opportunity.

**CHANGE:** Initial analysis of the data collected at Kavalur and other observatories in India reveal a constant change in the form of the tail, Prof. Sivaraman said. These changes, associated with the changes taking place in the surrounding inter-planetary medium, were noticed even hour-to-hour, he said.

The spectral analysis showed a large amount of molecules as well as dust being ejected by the comet, Prof. Sivaraman said. The amount of dust showed variation in the course of time. A very sophisticated instrument, interferometer, developed at the PRL was used in the 40" telescope to detect the speed of molecules and dust ejected by the comet. Analytical results will be available after a few months of study of all the data collected.

**KNOWLEDGE:** The newly commissioned 90" Vainu Bappu telescope opened its eyes formally on the Halley's comet. But a 20" Schmidt telescope has done the maximum photographing in Kavalur. The data collected in India along with information gathered throughout the world, is expected to provide a substantial in-depth knowledge of the fabled comet.

Named after an English astronomer, Edmund Halley, who "swore like a sea captain" but precisely predicted its 75 year orbit, Halley is one of the few heavenly spectacles known to people for centuries due to its enormity. A sight we missed, due to the earth's position in relation to the path of the comet.