
CURRENT SCIENCE — 50 YEARS AGO

THE INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS SILVER JUBILEE*

THE Silver Jubilee of the Indian Science Congress, which was celebrated in Calcutta this month, is an event over which everyone must rejoice who has at heart the welfare of science in India. We offer our congratulations to the Congress and extend a warm welcome to the foreign delegates who are attending.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Indian Science Congress to scientific progress in India. In the opening years of the century, though Indian scientific research already had a long and honourable history, it was confined almost exclusively to the members of the various scientific services of Government, and was almost non-existent in the universities and their constituent colleges. Already, however, the need for the vitalising of university teaching by association with active research work was being realised and in November, 1912, the Indian Science Congress was founded to afford definite annual occasions for the meeting together of research workers and others interested in scientific studies. It was welcomed alike by the scientific services as affording a meeting ground for members of different services with common interests, and by the universities, colleges, etc., as affording similar opportunities for the members of their staffs.

Many members of these staffs were keen enough to take up research work, but found great difficulty in finding time for it among their heavy teaching and administrative responsibilities. And as in most places no real provision for research was made, as regards either library facilities or equipment, it is not to be wondered at that their keenness was apt soon to dwindle and disappear when the stimulus of contact with active research workers was also lacking. The Indian Science Congress provided for such contact, with the result that keenness has been kept alive, time has gradually been found and more and more facilities have been provided, till as we look round at the steady work now being done in colleges all over the country, it is hard to realise that this was scarcely existent only twenty-five years ago. Other forces besides the Science Congress have, of course, been at work to bring about this result, but

this does not alter the fact that its annual meetings have been of vital importance.

The meetings of the Science Congress reflect the general intellectual development that has taken place throughout the country as a result of the spread of research work and the vitality it imparts to learning. At the earlier meetings very few contributors knew how to present their papers, which they laboriously read at full length to an audience where few if any would be able fully to understand even if they could at one reading grasp their meaning. Some there are who still thus inflict themselves upon their audience, but a steadily increasing number not only realise its futility but have become skilled in the art of selecting salient facts and presenting them in such a way as to interest all present, leaving the details for reference by specialists after the paper has been published. Not long ago the Madras Premier was pleading with the Madras Library Association for the putting aside of writings and a return to the ancient Indian tradition of using the living spoken word only. When the Indian Science Congress was founded there were very few scientific societies in the country that held meetings where this art could be practised, and the vast majority of Indian scientists had no opportunity of regularly attending any of them and of learning how to spread a knowledge of the truths their work was helping to reveal.

The Indian Science Congress has thus played a most important part in the recent rapid development of scientific work and influence in India, not only as a direct incentive to research but also by the way in which it has linked personally together sparsely scattered scientific workers from all over the country, making possible for the first time the growth of a wide-spread healthy atmosphere of scientific culture and co-operation.

The Asiatic Society (now the Royal Asiatic Society) of Bengal, as is well known, played by request a most important part in the fostering of the Science Congress during its earlier years, and the informal relationship thus established still happily persists. So helpful was the assistance given in early years that in his Presidential Address to the 1928 meeting, in which the history of the beginnings of the Congress are recorded, Prof. Simonsen says, "So far I can see the Society has not had any direct

*Published in *Curr. Sci.*, 1938, Vol. 6, p. 317.

benefit from the connection, whilst to us it has been of incalculable value. On financial grounds alone I do not think that without their aid we could have survived". By now the Indian Science Congress has been able similarly to assist other more recently conceived causes. *Current Science* itself, we are glad to acknowledge, came into being as the result of an informal meeting of scientists from all over India called together at the instance of members of the Indian Institute of Science and other bodies, during the Bangalore Meeting of the Congress in 1932; and the harmony established between the various all-India scientific societies that have been formed, for the most part comparatively recently, in different centres, is due in no small measure to the negotiations of a special Committee appointed by the Science Congress at its 1934 meeting.

The general plan on which the Indian Science Congress was conceived and built up was that of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and it is therefore peculiarly fitting that its Silver Jubilee should be celebrated by a joint meeting with that body. But it must not be supposed that the

former is simply a copy of the latter. Distances in India are so much greater than in Britain, that travelling takes much longer and costs much more. Consequently it is not possible for any large number of people habitually to attend every meeting. But those who endeavour to do so form a nucleus for gatherings, the composition of which varies in accordance with the geographical locations of the particular meeting but is always far from being confined to residents of that particular city or even Province or State. The Indian Science Congress may thus perhaps be said to bear a relation to its individual members intermediate between that borne by the British Association to its members in the British Isles and in the Dominions. Nor is this the only adaptation that has taken place to meet the need of Indian conditions.

The Indian Science Congress has already given twenty-five years of notable service to the country. We join in the thanks that must be given to those who have devoted their time and thought to its welfare, and we look forward to a period of steadily increasing utility for it in the future.

ANNOUNCEMENT

XIV GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE EUROPEAN GEOPHYSICAL SOCIETY

The XIV General Assembly of the European Geophysical Society will be held in Barcelona, Spain, 13-17 March 1989. Deadline for receipt of abstracts is 15 December 1988. For further details contact the EGS Office, c/o MPI für Aeronomie,

D-3411 Katlenburg-Lindau, Fed. Rep. Germany; or the Chairman of the L.O.C., Prof. E. Banda, Instituto de Geologia, Jaime Almera, Zona Universitaria Pedralbes, E-08028 Barcelona, Espania.
