
he ended his speech (read out by his wife as he was not permitted to receive the prize) with 'I would ask you to remember that all prisoners of conscience and all political prisoners in my country share with me the honour of this Nobel prize', and went on to give, one by one, the names of many of these prisoners. And when he heard the voice of Gorbachev on the telephone saying that his forced exile was over and that he could return to Moscow, his first words were again to plead for those who were under greater persecution than he, asking that all political prisoners be released. In an era of repression and silence his was a lonely voice for human rights, for political freedom, and the end of nuclear terror.

There is only one other man of this century who has ever commanded so much moral authority over his fellow men—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Sakharov himself acknowledged the immense influence Gandhi had on him. They were similar in their gentleness and personal manner, their being driven by the ethic of deep kindness and consideration towards their fellow men, their incomparable physical and moral courage, their

embracing individual conscience and responsibility. Because they took on other people's troubles on their own shoulders humanity looked up to them as saints. Yevgeny Yevtushenko says in his poem 'The heart on strike', 'His death has left a terrifying void in the moral life of the Soviet Union and the world.'

There is understandable anxiety whether Sakharov's death will diminish the cause of human rights in the Soviet Union and in the world. But there are others who feel it is unlikely as he has converted thousands, including Gorbachev, to take up much of his work.

We end this essay with a quotation from Sakharov himself:

Yet we should not minimize our sacred endeavours in this world, where, like the faint glimmer in the dark, we have emerged for a moment from the nothingness of dark unconsciousness into material existence. We must make good the demands of reason and create a life worthy of ourselves and the goals we only dimly perceive.

Yes, of him it can truly be said that when he died he left the world the poorer.

The quality of research in *Current Science*

What kind of research papers in life sciences should be published in Current Science? The pride of a scientist cannot be compromised with attempts to publish poor-quality papers based on mistaken justifications. In this and the next few issues, Current Science offers opinion.

Beginning this issue, *Current Science* will appear in a new format. Earlier announcements have already outlined the features that would find place in the journal. In addition to these features, it is obvious that original research will continue to be reported. Since a majority of papers received are in the broad area of life sciences, it is imperative to evolve some norms to identify original contributions. I feel a clear perception should be there as to what this premier Indian journal stands for. Over the years *Current Science* has acquired a 'human touch' in seemingly maintaining the quality of research papers published. The argument runs as follows: In India there are a limited number of well-endowed research institutions with competent people; these scientists are able to publish in the best of international journals; but what about the majority languishing in impoverished laboratories, university departments and, in particular, colleges? their career uplift also needs publications; *Current Science* with its wide circulation and popularity can provide a forum for these publications. In such a situation the referees tend to give a concession to papers submitted to the journal.

The time has come to re-examine the situation. There is a new-found urge to achieve in India. Everybody talks about evolution of Indian journals with high credibility and international standards, so that Indian scientists would be enthused to publish good papers in them. And yet, unless

good papers are published the journal cannot acquire credibility and international standards. It is clear that this circular argument brooks a solution. The only solution is that the journal should set high standards for publication. This should make the majority of scientists in less-fortunate circumstances fight the system and achieve despite the odds. It is well recognized in the country that the reason for poor standards of research is not just lack of facilities, but also the lack of a will to achieve. This is clear from the fact that, even in an impoverished environment, there are pockets of spark and research activity of high calibre. How is this possible? I feel that the pride of a scientist cannot be compromised with attempts to publish poor-quality papers based on mistaken—even harmful—justifications resting on reasons such as lack of facilities.

One can argue over what kind of research should be published in *Current Science*. It is difficult to evolve a norm except to state that the findings should be new, novel and of significance. It is perhaps easier to state what kinds need not be published. A large number of notes appearing in *Current Science* concern one or the other of the following:

1. Description of a 'new' species or a strain of an organism with some morphological data. It is usually stated that this is the first report. The evidence for a new species is far from

adequate and in most cases there is no follow-up in terms of detailed studies on the biology of the organism.

2. Beneficial/curative properties of plant extracts of one kind or another. Often data on the chemistry of the extract are poor or totally missing. Biochemistry in the target tissue would at best reflect secondary, routine changes.

3. Study of pesticides and other toxic compounds in a wide range of aquatic and other organisms.

4. Measurement of assayable parameters in biological systems with reference to some variable such as growth, temperature, etc. The biochemical parameters chosen are from the viewpoint of easy methods of estimation with minimum inputs, without relevance to the phenomenon. Some of the parameters measured are total protein, amino acids, acid and alkaline phosphatase, etc.

5. Tendency to split a good piece of detailed study into several notes for *Current Science*, to be listed as four

publications. Such a rounded piece of work should go to a standard journal publishing full papers.

I cannot in good sense plead for a total elimination of the above types of study, but most reports in these areas do not deserve to be published. Perhaps some of these reports should go to college and university journals till such time when these journals also wake up! On the other hand, papers submitted to *Current Science* should be of the type craving to establish priority in international science. Therefore, I feel that the research papers published in each issue can be limited to a small number, but those of really high quality.

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Current Science records with pleasure the appointment as Union Minister of State for Science and Technology of M. G. K. Menon, a former president of the Indian Academy of Sciences and one who has long been associated with this journal.

Over three and a half decades of remarkably fruitful life, Menon has influenced the growth of Indian science in many ways. He has made pioneering contributions to the field of cosmic rays and elementary particle physics. As director of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, as secretary to the Government of India, as head of various scientific departments, as chairman and member of commissions, as president and member of several national and international academic bodies, as physicist, and as administrator and policy-maker, he has left in the minds of those who came in contact with him abiding impressions of a wise, warm and generous personality. This is perhaps the first time that a man of science has become a minister in India. We wish him well in his new assignment.