

Ramaseshan Fellowships

The announcement of S. Ramaseshan Science Writing Fellowships in the memory of Sivaraj Ramaseshan is a welcome development (*Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **87**, 284). There could not have been a better tribute to Ramaseshan than training people in communication skills for portraying the developments in science, which have tremendous impact on the society. Ramaseshan strived to make *Current*

Science a high quality journal. The journal compares well with any prestigious journal of science communication in the world. Indian science needs accurate communication of the assessment of new scientific information and technologies emerging in its research centres, particularly those that have an impact on commercialization. Indian science reporting should attain the same quality of writ-

ings, which appear in *New York Times*, *Nature*, *News and Views* and *New Scientist*. Hopefully, a new cadre of science-writers will emerge from the Ramaseshan Fellowships.

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NEWS

New Head for DRDO

Defence technologist M. Natarajan, the man behind the development of the country's first indigenous tank, took over as the new Chief of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). He also assumed the post of Scientific Advisor to the Defence Minister from 1 September 2004. He succeeds Shri V. K. Aatre, who retired on 31 August 2004. Natarajan was previously chief controller of research and development for armaments, combat vehicles and engineering equipment.

Natarajan holds a B.Tech. degree (Mechanical Engineering) from IIT Chennai and an M.Tech. Degree specializing in Engineering Design from IIT Mumbai. He additionally holds a Master of Science

Degree in Military Vehicles Technology from the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS), United Kingdom. He joined the Defence Research & Development Organisation in 1970.

M. Natarajan has worked for over 30 years on several important project assignments relating to the design and development of tracked vehicles. He has been associated with MBT-Arjun programme since its inception. He took over the overall responsibility of development of the MBT Arjun in the capacity of Programme Director in 1987. He assumed charge as Director of the CVRDE on 1 December 1989. The continued hard work and innovative design approach and dedication of the highest order exhibited by

Natarajan and his team for over two decades resulted in India having an indigenous state-of-the-art Main Battle Tank Arjun and self-propelled gun system BHIM. Natarajan is a Fellow of Indian National Academy of Engineering and has also received the Distinguished Alumnus award of IIT Madras. In 2003, the Government recognized his service with the Padma Shri, for his contributions to the design and development of Combat Vehicles. He also received the Technology Leadership Award for 2003 from DRDO for his contributions to the design and development of Combat Vehicles and Mechanical Systems for LCA.

Monika Koul Moza

Luring women back to science – DST's Women Scientists Scheme

Every year, girls perform better than boys in science subjects in the Class X and Class XII exams in almost all State and Central Board examinations. In most of the institutions, majority of the toppers are girls. If we look at the trend of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) examination results in the past few years, girls have outshone boys and have scored 95–99% in science subjects. Then, why is it that there are few girls who land up pursuing a career in science? Why are there few women doing a Ph D in science and why are there only a few women scientists in our national institutes, laboratories and universities? The total enrolment of undergraduate

women students contributes only 30–34% of the students registered per year in colleges and universities.

The often-cited reasons for lesser number of women opting for science as a career are social pressures. Since higher studies in science involve more inputs, more working hours in classes and serious attention in practical classes, parents do not encourage girls to take up science in college. Another reason stated is that there are not many women scientists who are role models for girls. Teachers also discourage them from taking up science. Absence of mentors and gender bias in academic institutions also drive them away from science.

However, a change in attitude of women and their aspiration to develop a career have resulted in many girls pursuing Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in science. Only a few pursue higher degrees in science and complete their Ph D degrees with great zeal and perseverance. But, the fact remains that the drop-off factor of women from mainstream science goes on increasing at higher levels. Girls are forced to believe that marriage and family come first and they are conditioned to give up their career for the growth and well-being of their family. Thus, it becomes difficult for bright, young, creative minds to take up science as a full-time career. Moreover, women

carry the responsibility of child care as well as care of the aged in the family. Sometimes career breaks of a few months (for child birth) to a few years (for bringing up the child) are required. So their professional life suffers on account of their personal life. A few important steps need to be taken to utilize the potential of women in science and technology.

A proactive step in this regard taken up by Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India is the Women Scientists Scheme, DST's scholarship scheme for women scientists and technologists initiated in 2003. Women in the age group of 30–50 years, who desire to return to mainstream science, and who do not hold any permanent jobs and work as bench-level scientists can re-enter into mainstream science. Three categories of scholarships with research grants are available. Scholarships for Research in Basic/Applied Sciences (WOS-A) and Scholarships for Research in S&T-based Societal Pro-

grammes (WOS-B) are meant to encourage women scientists to pursue research in emerging and frontier areas of science and engineering, and application of some innovative solutions for various societal issues. Women scientists selected have the flexibility to undertake research at an institution of their choice and field of their interest. The selected candidates are awarded a fellowship of Rs 15,000 per month and a research grant of Rs 15 lakhs (maximum) for three years to cover cost of equipment, travel, contingencies and institutional overheads. Another category (WOS-C) is for internship for self-employment. This is to provide an opportunity to women scientists for self-employment utilizing their own specialized domain knowledge in areas such as patenting, proof-reading, science journalism, medical transcription, etc. The objective of this scholarship is to create a large pool of trained women workforce with experience in diverse areas and building a professional network. The qualifying

age for the candidates is 26 years and a scholarship of Rs 10,000 per month is awarded during the internship period.

Many qualified women scientists from different specialized fields of science in different parts of India have been awarded these fellowships during 2003. The number of scholarships awarded in Earth and Atmospheric Sciences is 11, Engineering Sciences 19, Chemical Sciences 25, Physical Sciences 25 and Life Sciences 60.

This year, DST is looking for more proposals so that all regions of the country are well represented in the scheme. Women are also encouraged to apply for internship scheme which will benefit them to continue their work in their field of interest. This seems to be the first step in the right direction to lure women back to science. Women scientists need to wake up to the call.

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