

CURRENT SCIENCE

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EDITORIAL

Signing Off

This journal will have a new Editor, beginning July 2013. R. Srinivasan, a distinguished geologist and currently associate editor, will assume editorial responsibility. The journal also has a new set of associate editors. E. Arunan, a chemist, and S. K. Satheesh, an atmospheric scientist, join N. V. Joshi on the team. Chandrika Ramesh, who oversees manuscript processing and M. S. Venugopal, who shoulders responsibility for production will be the executive editors. This new team, a mix of old hands and new faces, inherits a journal that has grown in size and visibility over the years, but which undoubtedly needs much greater improvement. Having spent a quarter of a century working on the journal, I am certain a new team will bring the much needed energy and drive for rapid improvement and change. The editorial staff, young and enthusiastic, are complemented by energetic short term interns and science writing fellows.

Signing off after a long association is never easy, but it is inevitable. Working at the journal has been a most rewarding experience, educating and challenging in large measure. Stressful situations have been substantially moderated by an outstanding set of colleagues, who have handled with equanimity the constraints of fortnightly production schedules, together with the pressures of dealing with impatient and sensitive authors, on the one hand, and defaulting and acerbic referees on the other. Issues of ethical transgression, plagiarism the most common, have been more frequently encountered in recent years, increasing the burden of the staff handling the regular operations of the journal. The journal's financial position has improved over the past few years providing some relief for those who manage *Current Science*.

I began to write this fortnightly column in July 1998, continuing till mid-2005, when I accepted my current position as the head of the Indian Institute of Science. There were two reasons for laying down the pen. Firstly, I was unsure if time to read, indiscriminately, would be available; an essential requirement for a writer perennially in search of a topic and bound by the strict deadlines imposed by the cycle of publication. Secondly, it seemed more than likely that any views expressed as an individual might be misconstrued as an institutional position, leading to potentially embarrassing, and inevitably

unpleasant, conflict of interest situations. Guest writers helped to fill the editorial column, but the regularity of appearance of these columns became hard to maintain. I returned to the task in January 2008 and have struggled over the past five and half years to produce a fortnightly piece, that is passable and moderately interesting to a diverse readership. At first glance, writing appears an easy task, especially to those brimming with opinions to express and possessing solutions to the many problems that abound in academia. It is only when I have put pen to paper (my mind still freezes when confronted with a screen and keyboard; an affliction which will pass with my generation) have I appreciated the term 'writers block'. However mundane the topic, however pedestrian the writing, it can still be a formidable task to string together a number of coherent sentences. Maintaining the length of a column to precisely fit a pre-determined space, in a journal with a printing deadline, can be a tiresome and demanding task. But, arguably, the most formidable barrier to be breached in writing a regular column is to find a topic and the background material that may be needed to flesh out a theme. Reading, with little discrimination and an eye open for a possible issue to discuss, has become a habit and a hobby over the years; undoubtedly taking time away from many other more useful and productive tasks. I have also lived in the shadow of the danger of becoming repetitive, an occupational hazard for compulsive writers and speakers.

This editorial column, which has permitted me to express unfettered, and possibly uninformed, opinion and allowed me to reflect on a wide range of topics has rarely been used to acknowledge those who have shaped the journal in recent times. About half a century after its founding in 1932, *Current Science* had begun to enter a lean phase in the 1980s. S. Ramaseshan (1923–2003) began the task of transforming the journal in 1988, a process I was privileged to witness at close quarters (*Current Science*, 2006, **86**, 5). His wide understanding of science and persuasive abilities enabled him to enlist many authors and referees to the task of ensuring a steady flow of manuscripts. His emphasis on the need for the journal to appear punctually was central to the transformation of the journal in the early 1990s. He recognized

the relevance of opening the pages of the journal to a wide spectrum of opinion on issues confronting science in India. K. R. Rao (1936–2008) joined the team at the journal in 1999 as associate editor. He was meticulous, generous with his advice and help to authors and amongst the first to spot the growing menace of plagiarism. He brought to the office of the journal a degree of scholarship, that ranged far beyond his discipline of physics, and the rare qualities of patience and large heartedness in dealing with authors which has been difficult to replicate (*Current Science*, 2008, **95**, 1507). Riki Krishnan (1971–2010), whose infectious enthusiasm for the journal, history and people was unbounded, ensured that my own enthusiasm for editorial chores and the sometimes forbidding task of producing an editorial column did not wane. Riki's humble designation of 'editorial assistant' did not fully reflect his contributions to the development of the journal (*Current Science*, 2010, **98**, 731). Ramaseshan formally retired as editor in 1996, but remained a source of strength till the end. K. R. Rao worked with his customary, quiet efficiency until the end came abruptly in 2008. Riki Krishnan was taken by cancer, in the prime of life in 2010, cutting short a career that would have undoubtedly blossomed at this journal. Chandrika Ramesh and M. S. Venugopal have admirably held the

fort at the office of the journal, steering a steady course through the turbulence created by changing technologies; a task rendered difficult by a demanding publication schedule. Even journals cannot escape the need for a calm and guiding influence in day-to-day administration, a function carried out remarkably quietly, with characteristic competence and commitment by G. Madhavan. Over the last few years, N. V. Joshi, K. S. Gandhi, S. S. Krishnamurthy and R. Srinivasan have borne the brunt of the editorial work as associate editors, aided by the contributions of several members of the Editorial Board. I owe a special debt of gratitude to all of them. No journal exists without authors, referees and readers. It is this diverse and far flung community which any editor must thank for the relevance and success of a journal. For all failings and errors, editors must accept responsibility and, undoubtedly, this journal may have erred on many occasions under my stewardship.

Current Science was founded just over eight decades ago as modern science began to take root in India. Much has changed since then and much more will in the future. This continuing transformation will, I am sure, find reflection in these pages.

P. Balaram