

CURRENT SCIENCE

Volume 64 Number 8

25 April 1993

CORRESPONDENCE

The letter published below from Sasti Brata Kabiraj, the science teacher living in a village Japamali, Bankura was received by G. Venkataraman, one of the Editorial Board Members. In forwarding his letter Venkataraman said as a working scientist he was greatly disturbed and asked us whether this should not be brought to the notice of other scientists. I replied that it should be. I also suggested to Venkataraman that the effect of this letter would be enhanced if he could write a guest editorial dealing on some of the vital issues raised by this teacher. We also publish Venkataraman's guest editorial in this issue.

—Editor

My purpose of writing is to draw your kind attention to how we, the villagers, are receding from the benefits of science and technology day by day. There is a gap between vision and reality even after 45 years of independence. Does science and technology benefit the rural people? Does it provide sufficient help to them? Electricity is the most important discovery of science but it has helped the rich, leaving a vast majority of rural people untouched.

'Survival of the fittest' is true, and the poorest are at the mercy of God. They cannot afford to have gas, electricity or even kerosene. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, food, clothing, housing, water, etc. are acute problems in their everyday life. Night blindness, anaemic condition of women, endemic goitre, dehydration of children due to acute diarrhoea, etc., are to be tackled properly and adequately fulfilled as cheap and simple remedies have been available for years.

Science is a powerful instrument of social change. So scientific temper must spread in all strata of the society. Today even the educated feel helpless and find it difficult to maintain a faith that they can be agent of change. Scientific temper must help the rural people to undertake a development strategy that will create confidence among them so that they can be participant in their day-to-day problems with the help of science and technology. They must also understand that they are not under the benevolent and malevolent influence of stars and planets, and to be rescued by God-men of various kinds.

The scientists alone cannot be blamed for this situation. Politics and political leaders have done real harm to the good and moral values of this country in the last 46 years. Tolstoy rightly stated that as long as a nation is ruled by bad people the benefit of science and technology is sure to be misused against mankind in general as they decide everything according to their need and greed. Perhaps all evil tendencies have surfaced and become powerful in India because of the selfish and dishonest notions of political leaders. However, blaming anybody is not the escape route from this situation. In fact no new S&T is needed to improve the living and thinking standard of this society. Whatever it has achieved in the past hundred years is sufficient to make man comfortable, happy and contented. Today, S&T can help only those who are capable of absorbing the fruits of their applications. In India intense scientific applications will only enhance the difference between the rich and poor and it is obvious today that in spite of great strides in the field of S&T the number of people below the poverty line is enormously on the increase. S&T by its very nature cannot remove poverty but it can widen the disparity. A social reform of a philanthropic nature alone can help in removing poverty.

I am a science teacher living at a village, in a very interior part of the country, working on popularization of science. Today S&T books, kits, simple instruments are so costly that these are beyond the capacity of rural pupil. We are slowly taking away from the thoughts of modern science and technology. Generally speaking, we do not know how much our country has progressed or how our reputed scientists are working in the context of other developing countries.

So, science in India needs a vigorous and all out cultivation of scientific outlook among all the sections of society. All students, teachers, research scholars, scientists, science lovers and popularizers must inculcate a sense of responsibility to the nation for a new and comprehensive science culture, a new science movement and it will be science for society — science for man.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon with much expectation.

My kind regards to you,

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-
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