

# CURRENT SCIENCE

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### Microbiology in India

Ramesh Maheswari's article on 'Whither microbiology?' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1995, 69, 401–406) should be an eye opener to all those microbiologists in India who think that salvation exists only in gene cloning and genetic engineering. We have not even seen a tenth of the microbial world and there is a lot more to explore and understand. What we have understood so far should form the basis of future biology, as Maheswari points out. The lopsided support that microbiology receives is one reason for believing that microbiology is not dead but is moribund. Neglect of classical microbiology is the reason why our national committee on plague has so far been unable to say what exactly caused the Surat epidemic. Carl Woese's thesis is only partly correct. Such ups and downs are seen in every branch of science. The reemergence of some of the well-known

diseases is one instance where the Western world has realized the importance of classical microbiology. Let us not be discouraged by all that people in the West have to say. After all, all that comes from the West need not be the best. Undoubtedly, there is a need to reorient our teaching and research in microbiology if we are to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is a pity that although this subject has been taught in more than 40 Indian universities under the UGC cover both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, there is as yet no attempt made to evolve a standard undergraduate curriculum. There is no need to despair but there is certainly a need to evolve a new trend in teaching microbiology to include both classical and modern aspects.

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### Feast of the Gods?

Total solar eclipse – October 1995 (J. C. Bhattacharyya, *Curr. Sci.*, 1995, 69, 486–488), will indeed be a spectacular event, which is bound to be fascinating for astrophysicists and equally for enthusiastic viewers. The mention of the comments of Dr M. K. V. Bappu, on the total solar eclipse of 1980, is full of aesthetic sense of feelings but the attempt to mix science with the feast of the Gods or for that matter with God even, sounds a strange contradiction.

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## NEWS

### Nobel Peace Prize for 1995 to Joseph Rotblat and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

The Norwegian Nobel Committee has awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1995, in two equal parts, to *Joseph Rotblat* and to the *Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs*, for their efforts to diminish the part played by nuclear arms in international politics and in the longer run to eliminate such arms.

It is fifty years this year since the two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and forty years since the issuing of the Russell–Einstein Manifesto. The Manifesto laid the foundations for the Pugwash Conferences, which have

maintained a high level of activity to this day. Joseph Rotblat was one of the eleven scientists behind the Manifesto, and has since been the most important figure in the Pugwash work.

The Conferences are based on the recognition of the responsibility of scientists for their inventions. They have underlined the catastrophic consequences of the use of the new weapons. They have brought together scientists and decision-makers to collaborate across political divides on constructive proposals for reducing the nuclear threat.

The Pugwash Conferences are founded in the desire to see all nuclear arms destroyed and, ultimately, in a vision of other solutions to international disputes than war. The Pugwash Conference in Hiroshima in July this year declared that we have the opportunity today of approaching those goals. It is the Committee's hope that the award of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1995 to Rotblat and to Pugwash will encourage world leaders to intensify their efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons.