The Indian Science Congress: Kumbh mela or an effective forum for Science & Technology

The rather hesitating final support for continuance of Indian Science Congress sessions by H. S. Virk¹, after comparing the same with the Kumbh mela does not recognize the unique success attained under the leadership of R. L. Mashelkar by the Pune (2000) Science Congress in (i) projecting in an effective manner the current frontier areas like bioinformatics, information technology, communication, genetic control, patenting problems and societal impact of science, as well as (ii) bringing about a remarkably close interaction between young and mature students of science during the session. These types of unprecedented achievements have been better reflected in a brief note by Rajendra Prabhu².

Started in 1914 on the pattern of the British Association of Science, the ISCA had tended to assume the status and role of a Magh melas of scientists. There has, however, been a distinct improvement since the introduction of the idea of a Focal Theme in 1976 by Swaminathan and the institution of a Task Force at the suggestion of Mehrotra by the DST since 1980, to follow up the recommendations of the focal theme. Unfortunately the functioning of this Task Force is no longer receiving the attention it deserves and requires much more serious effort(s) and sustained follow-up action.

Hopefully, the high standards of scientific discussions involving top leaders and the young learners, set up by the Congress in 2000 would be maintained in forthcoming sessions. Simultaneously, greater attention to well-thought out recommendations emanating from such a huge body of scientists should result, through concerted efforts of the Task Force, in a closer interaction amongst scientists, society and the governmental agencies.

Further, sustained and well-planned efforts for clearer understanding with the print as well as electronic media from well before till after the actual session should be an effective force for creation of scientific temper amongst the general public, scientists and policy makers – a dream with which ISCA was nurtured by persons like Jawaharlal Nehru.

In the above task of popularization of science, the ISCA secretariat under the overall guidance of the President and the Honorary Secretaries should play an active role with steps like: (i) Publication of the autumn (September) issue of Everyman’s Science with short biographies including photographs of the General and Sectional Presidents (preferably with a brief account of their plan); (ii) Securing brief synopses of invited and special/popular lectures at the general and sectional sessions and distributing them well in time for use by the print as well as electronic media; (iii) Developing an efficient distribution mechanism of the above materials; (iv) Activizing ISCA Regional Chapters in these directions.

In order to convince that the above suggestions are not merely theoretical, the writer of this note may be excused for citing (with utmost humility) that in his capacity as Assistant Local Secretary of the ISCA session held at Allahabad in January 1949, he could (i) publish the biographies of K. S. Krishnan and others in all the local as well as many national dailies and magazines coupled with (ii) half an hour’s broadcast daily in both Hindi/English at the All India Radio immediately after the News. In retrospect, it may be of some amusing interest that in these efforts, the author was motivated primarily to earn sufficient money to repay the loan (which as a teacher with extremely low salary), he had taken for the expenses of preparation and submission of his D Phil thesis in October 1948.


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