

Tracking the history hidden in these should be an exciting exercise in itself for souls that love challenges. If studying arts and literature have a social relevance then so does studying the astrology and palmistry; and perhaps much beyond. There are greater benefits that the historians of science might derive in understanding the ethos, the patterns of thinking and profiles of the logic (or illogic) used in constructing these subjects that have survived for long and are as pervading across cultures of the world as the idea of *God* is. A serious examination of the case sheet of the survival of these memes would perhaps help in understanding the evolution of the faculty of logic itself in the human mind as we evolved continuously in diverse cultures. In this sense, serious studies on these subjects would be as important as perhaps the social psychology is. After all 'Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises' (Samuel Butler, *Life*).

Maybe we would have thrown away even social psychology had it been suggested by the bodies that govern us and not by our own colleagues. We need to be less arrogant when we discuss the initiatives that emerge from the ill-famed bodies such as the state and religion. Besides there is an unfortunate development in the attitude of the scientists in India which I think is very unscientific: If any one, be it a politician or common man or even a scientist urges the need to indulge in studies that have a base in Indian heritage, or Indus history and Hindu origin (please note the continuum I have resorted to in usage of these words), he is labelled as irrational, fundamentalist, and the idea proposed by him unworthy of pursuing by any considerations. While these scientists take pride in citing Greek philosophers' erroneous belief about the origin of life and view it as an honest attempt in pursuit of truth, any such philosophical expression drawn from the Indian canvas is straightaway re-

jected as an useless rambling and immediately buried behind them; I think these ideas at least deserve a post mortem examination to assess how useless they are. Certainly these areas may not be as worthy as that of reading a sonnet from Shakespeare but at least more worthy than reading some history of a distant geographic domain that 'records the names of the royal bastards, but cannot tell us the origin of wheat' (Jean Henri Fabre). I wish to learn both about the bastards and their horoscopes. And if ever written I also wish to know how these horoscopes fared or failed.

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The Inter-Academy forum for biomedical sciences

Never before in the history of mankind has science had such a major impact on our daily lives. The food we eat today, the ways by which intractable diseases of the past can now be treated, the increase in our longevity and finally the way in which we can reproduce are all a result of the scientific advances made during the recent past. Our environment is rapidly changing because of the technological development that accompanies scientific progress. Global warming and pollution are some of the inevitable and undesirable consequences of technological over-use. Added to this there is the bombardment of information from the sky into the living rooms of almost anyone who can afford a television. Information is now freely available on any subject that one cares to inquire about.

We are faced with a situation that requires administrative decision making to be based on scientific advice that covers a whole gamut of cross-cultural needs of the pluralistic society of India. On a much larger scale, issues that affect mankind at large also require

similar advice from a core group of scientific advisors. The recent forming of the Inter-Academy Panel and Inter-Academy Council has brought together several scientific academies to work together and advise international decision makers on aspects that affect mankind at large (Tandon, P. N., *Curr. Sci.*, 2000, **79**, 266–268).

Given the current scenario in our country, there is need for the various science academies of the country to come together and identify problems of national interest and concern, debate on them and submit a well-considered recommendation to the Government on what can and needs to be done and what the catastrophic consequences would follow if these concerns are not addressed in time.

Recently, Fellows of the Bangalore Chapter of the National Academy of Medical Sciences voluntarily took the initiative to form an Inter-Academy forum for biomedical sciences.

This Forum will initially comprise Fellows of the Bangalore Chapters of the National Academy of Medical Sci-

ences, the Indian Academy of Sciences and the Indian National Science Academy. Membership to the Forum will also be open to those who are not Fellows of any of the Academies but are actively involved in the biomedical sciences including the pharmaceutical industry. This Forum is scheduled to be inaugurated on 31 March this year by N. K. Ganguli, President of the National Academy of Sciences.

The objectives of this Forum are to:

1. Take up serious scientific issues concerning the Nation, consider these in depth and make specific recommendations to the National Academies for further implementation.
2. To create greater public awareness on recent science developments so that a well-informed public is better equipped to get involved in the political decision making process of a democratic government.

The purpose of this letter is to draw the attention of as many people who would be interested in this endeavour and to join this Forum as members;

details of which can be obtained from any one of the members at the e-mail addresses given against their names.

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Indian Fellows of the Royal Society, London (1841–2000)

The fellowship of the Royal Society of London commands a special prestige in India (and other Commonwealth countries) for historical reasons. Table 1 lists the 39 Indian Fellows of the Royal Society (FRS) so far. Out of these six were in their thirties at the time of their election; 8 in their forties; 13 in their fifties; 11 in their sixties; and 1 in his seventies. Twenty-one of the Indian FRS are living; three of them (G. S. Khush, D. Lal and C. R. Rao) live in USA. To help place data in context, it may be noted that the total current fellowship is 1191; 59 fellows are in Australia, 48 in Canada and six in New Zealand. (Description in Table 1 is as in the Royal Society records.)

Contrary to popular belief, the mathematical genius Ramanujan is not the first Indian FRS. The distinction goes to Ardaseer Cursetjee (Wadia), India's first modern engineer (whose lineal descendents would found the Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Company at Mumbai). He was elected in 1841, while in England on official duty. At the time, the Society was still a club of gentlemen broadly interested in science. By the time Ramanujan became a fellow, the Society had already acquired its present rigour. Accordingly, Ramanujan's recognition greatly spurred Indian nationalist scientific endeavours. It is to the credit of the Society that Raman was elected a fellow before he was awarded the Nobel prize. (Even his knighthood preceded the prize.) Saha's fellowship helped him receive a research grant from a recalcitrant government. His contemporary S. N. Bose's election came much later, on Paul Dirac's initiative, as a corrective for the Society's oversight in

Table 1. Indian Fellows of the Royal Society, London (1841–2000)

No	Year of election	Name	Profession
1.	1841	Cursetjee, Ardaseer (1808–77)	Shipbuilder and engineer
2.	1918	Ramanujan, Srinivasa (1887–1910)	Mathematician
3.	1920	Bose, Sir Jagadis Chunder (1858–1937)	Biophysicist
4.	1924	Raman, Sir (Chandrasekhara) Venkata (1888–1970) (withdrawn 4 April 1968)	Physicist
5.	1927	Saha, Meghnad (1893–1956)	Physicist
6.	1936	Sahni, Birbal (1891–1949)	Palaeobotanist
7.	1940	Krishnan, Sir Kariamankam (Srinivasa) (1898–1961)	Physicist
8.	1941	Bhabha, Homi Jahangir (1909–1966)	Physicist
9.	1943	Bhatnagar, Sir Shanti Swarup (1895–1955)	Chemist
10.	1944	Chandrasekhar, Subrahmanya (1910–1995)	Astrophysicist
11.	1945	Mahalanobis, Prasanta Chander (1893–1972)	Statistician
12.	1957	Wadia, Darashaw Noshawan (1883–1969)	Geologist
13.	1958	Bose, Satyendranath (1894–1974)	Statistician
14.	1958	Mitra, Sisir Kumar (1890–1963)	Upper-atmosphere physicist
15.	1960	Seshadri, Tiruvankata Rajendra (1900–1975)	Chemist
16.	1965	Maheshwari, Panchanan (1904–1966)	Botanist
17.	1967	Rao, Calyampudi Radhakrishna (1920–)	Statistician
18.	1970	Menon, Mambillikalathil Govind Kumar (1928–)	Physicist
19.	1972	Pal, Benjamin Peary (1906–1989)	Agriculturist
20.	1973	Harish-Chandra (1923–1983)	Mathematician
21.	1973	Swaminathan, Mokombu S. (1925–)	Agriculturist
22.	1977	Ramachandran, Gopalamundram Narayana (1922–)	Biophysicist
23.	1979	Lal, Devendra (1929–)	Physicist
24.	1981	Paintal, Autar Singh (1925–)	Physiologist
25.	1982	Rao, Chintamani Nagesa Ramachandra (1934–)	Chemist
26.	1983	Chandrasekhar, Sivaramakrishna (1930–)	Crystallographer
27.	1984	Siddiqui, Obaid (1932–)	Molecular biologist
28.	1986	Ramalingaswamy, Vulimiri (1921–)	Medical scientist
29.	1987	Gopalan, Coluthar (1918–)	Nutritionist
30.	1988	Mitra, Ashesh Prasad (1927–)	Ionospheric scientist
31.	1988	Seshadri, Conjeevaram (1932–)	Mathematician
32.	1990	Sharma Man Mohan (1937–)	Chemical engineer
33.	1991	Swarup, Govind (1929–)	Radioastronomer
34.	1992	Narasimha, Roddam (1933–)	Fluid mechanist/aeronautist
35.	1995	Gurdev Singh Khush (1935–)	Rice breeder
36.	1998	Mashelkar, Raghunath Anant (1943–)	Polymer engineer
37.	1998	Sen, Ashoke (1956–)	Physicist
38.	2000	Raghunathan, Madabusi Santanam (1941–)	Mathematician
39.	2000	Ramakrishnan, Tiruppattur Venkatachalamurti (1941–)	Physicist