Ramaseshan's contributions to Indian Academy of Sciences and *Current Science**

Ramaseshan became a member of the Academy Council in 1968, even before the demise of C. V. Raman in 1970. In 1971 he was elected one of its Vice-Presidents and was primarily responsible for running the affairs of the Academy. Ramaseshan became its president in 1983. Even after he ceased to be in the Council after 1988, he was formally asked to look after the day-to-day routines of the offices which he did until 1997, when health reasons prevented his continued involvement. Between 1968 and 1997 he attended every meeting of the Academy Council and every Annual Meeting.

The post-Raman era was a period of intense growth in the Academy, thanks to successive presidents—T. S. Sadasivan, M. G. K. Menon, Satish Dhawan, S. Varadarajan, Obaid Siddiqi, C. N. R. Rao and Roddam Narasimha—all of whom had a clear vision for the Academy. Ramaseshan worked closely with all these presidents, who in turn greatly depended on him for implementing the decisions of the Council. In what follows, some of his major contributions are listed.

Until the 1970s, the procedure relating to elections to the Academy Fellowship was comparatively simple, with a statutory limitation on both the annual intake and the total Fellowship. In 1973, an amendment to the statutes paved the way for the election of nearly 200 new Fellows in just two years, bringing into the fold of the Academy many who could not have been elected otherwise. The statutes were rewritten to make them more comprehensive. A document on the 'Role of the Academy' was prepared which set the tone for a clear picture of what the Academy should strive for in the changed scenario. It also stressed the need for concrete proposals to translate science into action.

Sectional Committees were constituted, for the first time, to advise the Council on election of Fellows. Detailed guidelines were framed for the working of the Sectional Committees to ensure that the process of election is made as transparent as possible. Election of the best scien-

From left, M. G. K. Menon, S. Ramaseshan, C. N. R. Rao and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar during the Golden Jubilee Meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences in 1985.

*Dedicated to Prof. S. Ramaseshan on his 80th birthday.

Editorial: 10 July 1991

During the past 18 months *Current Science* has undergone many changes. This transformation has been catalysed by a perception that there is a place in the Indian scientific scene for a widely read, multidisciplinary science journal which would publish not only the results of original research but also provide a forum for communication among the members of India's growing scientific community. It seems that these changes have generally been supported by our readership—but we are only too conscious that there is still much room for improvement.

The changes made in *Current Science* are designed fundamentally to alter the structure of the journal to enable it to compete in the modern scientific market-place. The journal in its present garb is intended to be more readable by scientists working in different fields and also to provide a platform for the discussion of issues in science and the examination of science policies. For too long, the government's science policies have not been the subject of critical scrutiny by the scientific community. There exists no professional mechanism for the airing of ideas. It is this need that *Current Science* also hopes to fill in its general columns.

A multidisciplinary journal must cater to a wide audience. However, there is little doubt that in the recent past the pages of *Current Science* have been populated by articles mostly in one or two specific disciplines. A conscious effort is indeed being made to enhance the range and the quality of contributions in molecular biology, physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology and mathematics.

In consequence, the process of reviewing original papers in *Current Science* has been altered with the introduction of editorial screening before scrutiny by specialist referees. This procedure allows quick return of manuscripts that do not fulfil the criteria of specific importance, originality or general interest. This is to ensure quicker decision-making and is also intended to reduce the number of highly specialized papers reporting routine results in just a few fields.

Despite these measures to make *Current Science* popular and readable, its reputation must undoubtedly be determined by the quality of the original research papers carried by the journal. The scientific community generally clamours for the maintenance of a high quality in publishing papers. Unfortunately, in reality the pressure from authors to publish indifferent papers is high.

Indian journals fight a losing battle to attract the best local research papers which often (and we are told justifiably) find their way to journals published abroad. Attempts to improve the quality, even by a few carefully chosen journals, are generally rendered difficult by the ambivalent attitude of the scientific community at large, and, more importantly, of the more visible leaders of scientific research in this country.

We hope to vigorously work towards making *Current Science* an attractive forum for reporting exciting new research results. To do this, the time gap between receipt and publication of an acceptable manuscript will be reduced by speeding up the process of refereeing and by ensuring that there are no delays in the dates of appearance of the journal. Ideally, we hope that the process of review can be completed within four weeks for Communications and publication within four weeks acceptance. This, of course, demands that we set our house in order. Meanwhile, this period of transition in *Current Science* has been characterized by the publication of several special issues which have focused attention on areas where there has been a major contribution by Indian scientists or on topics of general interest. The purpose of these issues has been to incorporate original papers of high quality and to invite the participation of a wide cross-section of established scientists across the world and also to draw attention to the journal itself.

Concerted attempts to improve the quality of review and general articles are also being made. Other strategies to enhance the readability of the journal include the publication of historical notes, book reviews, reports of S&T work in India, personal news, and, most importantly, research news and commentary. Since *Current Science* has a varied readership and many of our colleges and institutions do not have complete access to foreign journals, progress in science made anywhere in the world must be reported in its columns—and commentaries written on them.

In order to maintain the momentum of the past few months and to accelerate the process of change, a newly constituted Editorial Committee joins the journal with this issue which also is the first issue of the new volume. This group, we are sure, will interact with the scientific community in enhancing the quality of *Current Science*.

tists, particularly at a relatively young age, was given added emphasis, at the same time ensuring that in doing so the senior ones were not overlooked. A new category of young scientists, known as Associates, was inducted to involve them in the activities of the Academy.

With considerable help, notably from C. N. R. Rao, the publication activity was considerably expanded. The *Academy Proceedings*, published since 1934 in two sections, were split into theme journals dealing with mathematics, chemistry, earth and planetary sciences, plant and animal sciences, and modern biology. Following widespread consultation with the physics community in the country spread over a year, a new journal of physics *Pramana* was started in 1973, with Ramaseshan taking over as its first editor. New journals in materials science, engineering sciences, and astronomy and astrophysics were added. Ramaseshan, inspired by Satish Dhawan and others, initiated moves that eventually resulted in the Academy taking over from the JBS Haldane Trust the responsibility for publishing the *Journal of Genetics*, the oldest English journal in the field of genetics. Editorial boards were constituted for the first time with a chief editor for each journal who was given full freedom and independent responsibility for running their respective journals. As general editor of publications, Ramaseshan helped in formulating the publication policies of the Academy, which were based on the concept that the Academy will not start any journal of its own in competition with others and if there is indeed justification for starting a new journal, every effort will be made to collaborate with other organizations.

To increase the circulation of journals, particularly overseas, Ramaseshan negotiated with a distributor in Switzerland and another in India to promote and distribute the journals. When it was realized, after five years, that the circulation of journals had not improved, this arrangement was discontinued despite the fact that it brought increased subscription revenues for the Academy.

Typesetting and printing of journals, done for decades by a sole printer in Bangalore, the quality of which was declining, was taken up on priority. Ramaseshan negotiated with reputed presses such as Macmillans and Thomsons and reorganized the printing of the Journals. The Academy journals were one of the earliest in the country to switch over to computer phototypesetting and later on to desktop composition. Today, the results are there for everyone to see.

Bringing out special publications of topical interest was one of Ramaseshan's initiatives. During the Raman centenary in 1988, he painstakingly put together Raman's 450-odd papers in six volumes, totalling 4000 printed pages, with a detailed introduction which he wrote for each of the volumes. With help from staff of the Raman Research Institute, he compiled a pictorial biography on C. V. Raman. The publication of the collected works of several Raman Professors who visited India was one of his initiatives.

The golden jubilee of the Academy in 1984, during Ramaseshan's presidentship, was marked with less of frills and more of scientific value. Many Fellows contributed research articles to special issues that all journals brought out during the year. The Academy's 'first 50 years' was compiled with help from Anna Mani. A newsletter for the Academy entitled *Patrika* was started.

Together with S. Varadarajan, Ramaseshan brought home to the funding agencies the concept that publication of scientific journals is a necessary and inevitable extension of scientific research. Indeed the contention that a 'piece of research not published is as good as not carried out', won the day. This considerably improved the finances of the Academy. Funds, particularly from the Department of Science and Technology, enabled strengthening the publication activities of the Academy and the starting of several new activities such as discussion meetings, public lectures, etc. Creation of a corpus for the Academy also gained momentum simultaneously.

As the activities of the Academy increased, the staff strength also increased, although not proportionately. It was Ramaseshan's firm belief that a small but dedicated team of staff with good working conditions could contribute to increased efficiency. Until 1980, the Academy offices were functioning from a small building, on a single floor of approximately 1800 square feet, which also housed unusually tall wooden racks to store back-volumes accumulated since 1934. When the racks got filled, the books spilled over creating a difficult and hazardous working environment. Ramaseshan, with Varadarajan, helped to ease the situation by getting funds for constructing an additional floor. He obtained for the Academy space away from the campus to store the ever-growing volumes of back issues. He helped establish a close working relationship with the Raman Research Institute, which took care of many of the maintenance needs of the Academy offices.

Current Science

Ramaseshan took over the editorship of *Current Science* in 1989. Until then, while the fortnightly did maintain its reputation as a punctual publication, the quality, both in content and production, had declined. The circulation had dropped to less than 1000. Ramaseshan set about reforming and transforming the journal and achieved an almost five-fold increase in circulation. His editorial of 10 July 1991 (see box) set forth the measures that he proposed for the reorganization of the journal. An editorial board, constituted for the first time, began taking active interest in running the journal. It is said that nothing succeeds like succession. When it was time to find a successor, it was achieved with quiet efficiency. Today we have in *Current Science* one of the better journals in India that the scientific community can be proud of and which is greatly looked forward to for every issue every fortnight.

If the Academy and *Current Science* have today attained some reputation in the country, it is in no small measure due to the efforts of Ramaseshan.

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