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CORRESPONDENCE

India is emerging global leader in science popularization

Creating public understanding of science in an era when science and technology are permeating every fabric of society needs no emphasis. And communicating science to the public is a multifaceted activity being practised all over the globe. Most importantly, India is fast emerging as a global leader in the field of science popularization.

The fact that two Indians – Dorairajan Balasubramanian and Jayant V. Narlikar have won consecutively the most prestigious global honour in the form of UNESCO Kalinga Prize for popularization of science for the years 1997 and 1996, respectively, justifies this belief scientifically. More so, as this distinction has been repeated by India after a gap of almost three decades, the other three instances being that of UK (Ritchie Calder, 1960 and Arthur C. Clarke, 1961); USA (Warren Weaver, 1964 and Eugene Rabinowitch, 1965); and again UK (Fred Hoyle, 1967 and Gavin de Beer, 1968). Moreover, for UK, the most recent recipient was in the year 1985 (Peter Medawar) whereas for India, it was Narendra K. Sehgal in 1991. However, Jagjit Singh was the first Indian to get this prize way back in 1963 (ref. 1).

Specifically, the 1997 Prize was awarded to D. Balasubramanian, Director, L. V. Prasad Eye Hospital, Hyderabad for his extensive work as a science columnist and journalist for daily newspapers, writer and presenter of programmes on a wide range of science subjects for television, and author of science books.

The 1996 UNESCO Kalinga Prize had been awarded to J. V. Narlikar, Director, Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune and Czech astronomer Jiri Grygar. Narlikar has written many articles popularizing science in English, in his native Marathi and in Hindi. He has been a regular contributor to radio and television programmes in these three languages. His 17-part television astronomy series entitled *Brahmand (The Universe)*, which was transmitted in Hindi, also enjoyed great success, especially among young viewers. In addition, Narlikar is a science-fiction writer whose novel *Dhoomak (The Comet)* has been adapted into a screen version.

The Kalinga Prize for the popularization of science, worth one thousand pounds sterling, has been awarded every year since 1951 to scientists, writers, editors, lecturers, radio and television programme

directors, film producers and others whose work has promoted the popularization of science, research and technology among the general public. Created by the UNESCO through a grant from B. Patnaik, founder of the Kalinga Foundation Trust, the prize also enables recipients to travel to India to study the country's life and culture, its research, educational institutions, industry and economy.

There could be many reasons for this global feat. But it looks like India offers an excellent opportunity for its innumerable, mostly self-made science communicators to choose not only many means of communication – interpersonal channels/traditional folk media/mass media – but also several languages/dialects for all possible levels of literacy ranging from illiterates to highly educated. With this backdrop, one only hopes for India to record the first ever hat trick in this field.

1. Jain, N. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 1994, 66, 618–620.

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Cost-effective databases for research

The suggestion of P. Pichappan (*Curr. Sci.*, 1998, 74, 721) for the use of cost-effective databases for promotion of research activity in Indian universities is welcome. I fully support his suggestion and agree with his observation that awareness of citation index databases among Indian researchers is very low as they are available only at a few selected institutes till date.

My own experience is that there is utter lack of awareness among the university authorities and librarians for mak-

ing use of *SCI* databases. Even when Internet facility is available, the individual researchers are not encouraged to make use of this facility. In the absence of adequate number of research journals, most of the Indian researchers depend on the reprints borrowed from their peers in India and abroad. I, myself, follow this practice as there is hardly any journal in our library in my area of specialization.

It is true that most researchers have access to desktop computers and CD-ROM drives are available in the market

but expenditure of amounts up to Rs 60,000 from the project funds is difficult. I hope the funding agencies will allow special funds for the purchase of relevant databases pertaining to the theme of research.

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