

Concern over nation's scientific priorities

By Our Science Correspondent

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There was cause for deep concern in the way science was being pursued in the country, according to Prof. G.Venkataraman, Vice-Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

The occasion was the golden jubilee celebrations of the Raman Research Institute being held today as it is the birth anniversary of its founder, C.V.Raman.

In his keynote address, Prof. Venkataraman, who has written an authoritative biography of C.V.Raman, contrasted the values espoused by Raman and those found today. He wondered what the man, who warned his country against hanging on to the coat-tails of Europe and argued against import of knowhow and technology, would have thought of this age of liberalisation.

Raman believed India should become a leader in science, not be a camp-follower. He wanted scientific instruments to be built in India, not imported. Yet today scientific priorities in the country were often set by what was being done abroad. Prof. Venkataraman wondered how much of the country's scientific budget was spent in importing equipment.

If students were not keen on taking science, the Indian scientific community needed to examine itself, according to Prof. Venkataraman. Raman had foregone a trip to the United States in order to build up the Raman Research Institute. When he was conferred India's highest honour, the Bharat Ratna, Raman excused himself from attending the investiture ceremony, writing to the President of India, explaining that a student of his was required by university regulations to submit his doctoral thesis during that



Well-known scientists (from left) Prof. A.Jayaraman, Prof. M.G.K.Menon, Prof. G.Venkataraman, Prof. Satish Dhawan and Prof. N.Kumar, at the golden jubilee celebrations of the Raman Research Institute in Bangalore on Saturday.

period. By contrast, students and staff in scientific institutions now talked about directors and professors who were constantly travelling abroad.

C.V.Raman spent a lot of time meeting and lecturing to students. He started scientific journals and publications in India. Today, good scientists in India had no time for giving such talks or preparing good textbooks.

Prof. Venkataraman was critical of Indian scientists for failing to speak out against issues such as the technology embargoes imposed

against India. He expressed concern about the state of higher education, which was necessary for science to flourish.

In his talk, Prof. M.G.K.Menon said that at a time when institutions deteriorated and mediocrity set in, C.V.Raman would have been happy to find that the Institute he founded had kept to the path of scientific integrity and excellence.

Prof. Menon, who has headed the RRI Trust since its inception, pointed out that Raman not only created the Institute, but also "gave it a

spirit". "We have to ask ourselves how worthy we have been of that heritage," he added.

Prof. Satish Dhawan, who has been Chairman of the RRI Governing Council from the beginning, pointed out that C.V.Raman had been well aware that the world was changing and there would be pressures from academia, Government, industry and even from the public. He was concerned that the science carried out at the Institute must not be affected by such pressures. Although RRI was now largely aided through public funds, the Institute remained a vigorous and friendly place for science, with a unique character of its own.

Prof. A.Jayaraman, who did his doctorate under C.V.Raman and was one of the early staff of RRI, reminisced about those days. "I can still see that tall turbaned figure," he said. Raman imparted to his students everything needed to make a first-rate scientist. Apart from a broad outlook, appreciation of nature, the ability to look at things in a simple way, association with Raman also gave self-confidence, and the ability to go out boldly and accept experimental challenges, said Prof. Jayaraman, who later moved to the United States.

Giving a synoptic view of the research papers published by the Raman Research Institute during C.V.Raman's time and afterwards, Prof. S.Ramaseshan recalled how Raman had collected little bits of broken glass littered around when window panes were being installed at the Institute and then used them to carry out experiments in optics. The Nobel Laureate had devised many beautiful experiments and evolved theories concerning perceptions of light.

The Ceremony ended with a slide show which highlighted moments from Raman's life.