

SCIENCE IN NEW INDIA

By SIR C. V. RAMAN

FOR more years than I can remember, THE HINDU has been in the very forefront of India's fight for freedom. In its own characteristic fashion, it energetically voiced our desire for liberty, and while checking the more explosive manifestations of rebellious spirit which the chains binding us naturally evoked, forcefully urged on the laggards who considered personal advantage more important than the country's welfare. I do not remember that the British imperialism found it necessary on any occasion to close down the offices of THE HINDU and to march off its Editor to jail. But THE HINDU has nevertheless been a power in the land, and one cannot wish better for a Free India than that the same catholicity, moderation and reasonableness which has been its policy will continue to inspire the chosen leaders of the nation in its onward march of progress.

While on this occasion of rejoicing, no one would wish to minimise the part played by the men who built up the spirit of national resistance and fought and won the battle of independence in the political field, it should not be forgotten that the resurgence of the national spirit manifested itself also in other fields of activity, and that its success in those other fields helped internally in rousing the feeling of self-confidence in our people, and externally in winning respect for India's spiritual and intellectual calibre from the intellectuals of other nations. The remarkable renaissance of Science in India during the last quarter of a century did more to establish abroad India's credit and status as a nation than most people realise or would be willing to concede.

It gives me great pleasure to respond to the Editor's request to write on Science in Free India. In doing so, I must regretfully point out that India is not yet free in the field of science. British imperialism, while prepared in the last resort to apply physical force, has always preferred to use less obvious methods of imposing her will on weaker peoples. In an invited article which appeared a few years ago in the American Political Science Quarterly, I presented a picture of the methods by which the scientific renaissance of India was held back for a whole century by foreign rule. When such holding back was no longer possible, those very agents who worked against India's progress claimed to be her greatest friends and to have inspired and guided whatever progress had been achieved in spite of them. A typical example of this is to be found in an article in a British journal published by a European ex-official scientist who claimed that the father of Indian science was the orientalist Sir William Jones! The same ex-official showed his real feelings towards Indian science by sponsoring the formation of a predominantly official organisation as a rival to the Indian Academy of Sciences when the latter was founded. He even went to the length of inspiring the issue of an official circular enjoining all men of science holding government position not to join the Indian Academy of Sciences even if invited to do so by its promoters. After this, is it surprising that the Government of India while lavishing funds on the official organisation turned a deaf ear to repeated requests even for a token grant to the Indian Academy of Sciences? Is it surprising that a British official who is still in this country making difficulties for us publicly defended such refusal on the ground that the official organisation was recognised by the Government of India as the superior body? Is it surprising that this same official is now doing his best to prevent unity amongst Indian scientists?

Science can be free in India only when we eradicate the tendencies which a century or more of foreign rule has left behind as an evil legacy. The worst legacy is our own belief in the superiority of European scientists and scientific institutions to those in our own country. So long as this belief continues, there does not seem to me the remotest chance of Indian science rising to the level permitted by her new opportunities. Another evil legacy is the wholly erroneous belief that the three letters F.R.S. after a man's name mean that he is superior to those who do not bear that alphabetical distinction. Having been an F. R. S. myself for a quarter of a century, I know exactly what those letters mean both in the Empire context and in relation to India. The Royal Society of London is a stronghold of British imperialism containing no small proportion of men to whom science and scientific truth are less important than the maintenance of the British right to rule over the rest of the world. The sooner we in India realise this and shake free of a superstitious belief in the ability of the European people to guide our destinies in the intellectual sphere any more than in the political field, the sooner we shall march to the goal of our national ambitions.

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