

The death of scientific inquiry

by Gonit Sora - Tuesday, March 17, 2015

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How many of us know that according to the Article 51A in the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution “It shall be the duty of every citizen of Indian to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of enquiry and reform.”? That means not only scientific thinking is essential in this day and age, but according to the Constitution of India it is our fundamental duty. And yet, we see people not only neglecting this duty, but some of them go so far to suggest that Indians had automobile technology in the ancient period of our epics and that we gifted the Pythagoreans their right to a name of a theorem which everyone of us learns in school.

India, as it now stands is in the watersheds in terms of scientific output and innovation. We are still living in the past when we had people of the caliber of Sir C. V. Raman, Sir. J. C. Bose, S. Ramanujan, etc. That was the golden age of India science. After that, even with independence, India has not been able to produce anyone of their standing yet in any endeavor of science, technology, medicine and mathematics. It has been 85 years since an Indian, living in India won the Nobel Prize for work that he or she did in India. There must be something seriously wrong somewhere. Else, how do you explain this fact with a country that is supposed to have a very good education system with good policies. Or is the reason too simple? Are we too weak that we cannot do science?

The reasons for this lack of accolades in the scientific sector is not very hard to find. Right from our childhood we are always made to rote memorize the things that we are supposed to learn in school. We do not ever question what the teacher says, perhaps because of being colonized for too long by a race who considered themselves superior to us. By the time we are in high school, it has been ingrained in our minds that anyone who is not going to be a doctor or an engineer would be wasting his time in this world. And every second of our life we try to fulfill what our parents and teachers dream off us, never once considering where our true passion may lie. This is the way Indian school system works nowadays, and if new reforms and policies are not brought out soon, then we are in a danger of losing credibility not only in the present but also of our illustrious past. In short, the atmosphere for scientific thinking does not exist at present in India.

India is in crying need for innovators, not only in education but in almost every aspect of its being. We need people who can bring in the next big change in the world, and yet we remain content at praising others. People will go mad on social media when some random Hollywood movie gets nominated for five Oscars, but they will not even know that an Indian scientist has been honored as one of the Top 10 innovators of 2014 by the prestigious journal of science called 'Nature'.

We have become stupid to assume that we do not need geeks who can be scientists, mathematicians and technologists. We have been brainwashed into believing that what the society needs are superstars who can clean up the nation in a single cleaning spree. We have forgotten to respect intellectuals for what they really are, and we are so easily swayed by the mediocre that we wouldn't know when true genius stands in front of us. Otherwise, how do you explain that an entire nation had to Google who was Kailash Satyathi

when he won the Nobel Prize for Peace last year. Isn't that proof enough, that something is seriously wrong with us as a nation?

The onus on creating a convivial atmosphere in India for scientific thought and inquiry lies with the youth. If you decide to stop every time a black cat crosses your path, then you are not only disrespecting the Constitution of India by not developing a scientific temper but also somehow silently contributing to the overall loss of our nation scientifically. The loss of sheen in India's scientific frontier can be attributed partly to the political class too, with many bad decisions that have influenced so much of our past, present and will continue to influence the future. In a country with a dozen IITs and another multitude of NITs, we still have to depend on other nations for most of our technological needs. Instead of creating institutes which are dime a dozen, why not create an outstanding Indian university much like Oxford or Princeton or ancient Nalanda?

If Indian science, and its scientists are not given their due in time, there is a grave danger of us being superseded by lesser nations in all aspects. It is perhaps as good a time as any to realize that our true rockstars or superstars are the ones who sent a probe to another planet and that too by becoming the first country to do so successfully in the very first attempt. That they are the people who can bring in a real change if they are given wings to their imagination. After all, we have still not lost the hope of having a developed India by 2020.

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