

## Sivaraj Ramaseshan: A birth centenary remembrance of an editor

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*Current Science* is 91 years old. The centenary of the journal is not too far away. Born in 1932, this journal was modelled on the two major interdisciplinary journals of that time, *Nature* and *Science*. The hope was that the journal would bring together the results of scientific research being carried out in Universities and academic institutions across the country, at a time when the country had only a fledgeling scientific enterprise. The Bengal renaissance was at its height and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore was slowly expanding in its third decade. C. V. Raman would move in 1933 to Bangalore to become the first Indian Director of IISc. The need for a journal to bind Indian science was clearly felt by the late 1920s (ref. 1). In its early years, *Current Science* was nurtured by two extraordinary Editors, C. R. Narayan Rao (Central College, Bangalore) and M. Sreenivasayya (IISc) (ref. 2). By the 1940s, Raman's influence on the journal grew, as he assumed the role of the President of the Current Science Association, ensuring that the scientific content of the journal was of a high standard. The rapid growth of the science establishment in India between the 1950s and 1980s, the appearance of many other journals in specific disciplines and the increasing pressure on Indian scientists to publish in foreign journals slowly eroded the importance of *Current Science*, in the context of science in India. By the mid-1980s the journal was struggling to produce two issues every month and production timelines were not easily met. Manuscripts submitted to the journal were piling up, waiting to be reviewed. The journal required a complete overhaul. Every crisis throws up a saviour. For *Current Science*, it was Sivaraj Ramaseshan (10 October 1923–29 December 2003) who assumed charge as Editor in 1988, bringing to the task remarkable vision and an unmatched passion for enhancing the quality and visibility of the journal.

Sivaraj Ramaseshan was a physicist of high order with many stellar contributions in the areas of optics, crystallography and materials science. He was a science administrator of great distinction, ending his formal professional career as the Director of IISc (1981–1984). He ensured that the Raman legacy in Bangalore survived after C. V. Raman's passing in 1970. The serene

and verdant campus of the Raman Research Institute (RRI) houses both the Indian Academy of Sciences and the Current Science Association. Ramaseshan played a key role in all three organizations in the years of transition. His scientific and organizational abilities were critical in the formative years of IIT Madras and the National Aerospace Laboratory (NAL), Bangalore. But, in paying a tribute to his memory I cannot help but reflect on his role in resurrecting *Current Science*.

Ramaseshan had a long-standing love affair with journals. He was instrumental in starting *Pramana*, a journal of physics in the 1970s and was also Editor of Publications of the Indian Academy of Sciences. *Current Science* needed critical care in the mid-1980s and Ramaseshan assumed the role of the care giver. Not long after he had assumed office as Editor, he arrived in my laboratory at IISc in mid-1988. I was not at my desk in the corner of the room. He had occupied a chair next to a student and was engaging her in conversation. She was unaware of who he was. When I entered, not noticing him, she hurried after me and whispered, 'There is a very senior person looking for you'. Even as I wondered what could have brought a former Director to my rather disorganized laboratory, Ramaseshan walked up enquiring with a smile about my research. It was clear he was interested

in other topics. Having put me at ease he said he needed help with *Current Science* and would I be able to arrange a meeting at IISc with students and young faculty. I did. It was a small gathering, a motley assembly of students and a couple of faculty members. Nothing much emerged, even though Ramaseshan spoke with great enthusiasm about the need for everyone to write about science and also to publish original research in the journal. But the die had been cast. I was the only one to volunteer for the more mundane job, of taking on the clerical work, that is inevitably necessary to run a journal with a tight schedule. He had drafted me as his assistant.

It was as his apprentice, that I saw his ability to extract the best out of people who worked with him. He was friendly, informal and had the uncanny ability to put everyone at ease. This was a period of transition in scientific publishing. Journals had begun to have attractive covers. Colour reproductions were becoming common in the best of journals. Ramaseshan was quick to sense an opportunity. Improving the journal's appearance and its punctuality might be the first realizable goal, even as we struggled with content. He was open to the idea of devoting the first few pages to discussions about science in India and issues concerning scientists. He introduced columns on Research News and was indefatigable in



From right: S. Ramaseshan, G. N. Ramachandran (seated), P. Balaram and R. Narasimha (then President Indian Academy of Sciences) in 1991.

**Current Science published reminiscences of Sivaraj Ramaseshan by his students, friends and colleagues on two occasions, in the 10 October 2003 issue on his 80th birthday and in the 10 January 2004, issue following his passing on 29 December 2003. Links to the articles are provided below.**

**October 2003**

K. Venkatesan (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/85/07/1078.pdf>)  
 C. N. R. Rao (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/85/07/1079.pdf>)  
 M. S. Valiathan (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/85/07/1080.pdf>)  
 Rajaram Nityananda *et al.* (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/85/07/1082.pdf>)  
 G. Madhavan (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/85/07/1084.pdf>)

**January 2004**

P. Balam (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/01/0005.pdf>)  
 Rajaram Nityananda (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/01/0220.pdf>)  
 K. Venkatesan and H. Manohar  
 (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/01/0222.pdf>)  
 C. N. R. Rao (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/01/0223.pdf>)  
 G. Srinivasan (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/01/0224.pdf>)  
 C. P. Rajendran (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/02/0244.pdf>)

**Other articles**

Rajinder Singh (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/86/08/1056.pdf>)  
 A. Rajanikanth (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/87/01/0008.pdf>)  
 Kausalya Ramaseshan (<https://www.currentscience.ac.in/Volumes/88/05/0831.pdf>)

soliciting general articles for the journal. He opened the correspondence and opinion columns to scientists and readers wishing to express their views, being quite tolerant to criticism of the scientific establishment of which he was an important part. Ramaseshan wrote on subjects that might have a special relevance today. He wondered about the multiplicity of Science Academies in India, pointing out tongue (undoubtedly) in cheek that C. R. Narayan Rao's eloquent editorial in the May 1933 issue of *Current Science* on 'An Indian Academy of Science' was so compelling that instead of one Academy the country got three. His historical piece on the subject in the 25 November 1994 issue of the journal, together with Narayan Rao's 1932 column should be required reading for those entrusted with the responsibility of running the academies today<sup>3,4</sup>. The National Science University debate of the late 1990s was initiated in the pages of this journal (10 October 1994), a discussion that might well be the starting point for a long process that led to the establishment of the Indian Institutes of Sci-

ence Education and Research (IISERs) over a decade later. He was concerned about the journal increasing its readership and visibility in India; fortunately, those were times when Eugene Garfield's journal impact factor had not yet become commonly known. Finances were always a concern and Ramaseshan introduced the institutional membership scheme, a permanent subscription after a one-time contribution. I recall a librarian asking me if the subscription was for the lifetime of the institution or the journal. To tide over the lean period in the late 1980s, Ramaseshan suggested that we produce special issues of the journal highlighting the work of the best of Indian scientists of years past. Rather naively, I suggested the names of Sambhu Nath De and G. N. Ramachandran little realizing that he would readily agree if I produced the articles required, a task that occupied the better part of two years. These were the first two special issues produced by the journal as Ramaseshan slowly established the punctuality of production schedules and faster responses to authors from

the journal's office. Those were days before e-mail, the internet and electronic submissions speeded up the routine jobs of manuscript handling.

By the early 1990s he was becoming frailer. I joined him as Co-Editor in 1995, with the transition complete by 1996. In the 18 years that I served as Editor (1995–2013), the lessons that I had learnt during my apprenticeship with Ramaseshan proved invaluable. In the midst of any controversy that I found myself, I could picture Ramaseshan, with a twinkle in his eye, urging me to follow my instincts. Ramaseshan had many great contemporaries, some of whom I came to know. Satish Dhawan an incomparable builder of institutions, who laid the foundations for the culture of the Indian Space Research Organisation and transformed the Indian Institute of Science in the 1960s and 1970s was his long-term friend and colleague. G. N. Ramachandran, a scientist of extraordinary insight and great accomplishment was an early collaborator, with a shared interest in optics and crystallography, which both acquired under the tutelage of C. V. Raman. They were all men who grew to adulthood in the decades before independence. They shared a vision of a scientifically advanced India and spent their lives working for that cause. They were products of a heady time when commitment to the country's institutions seemed important. In remembering Ramaseshan, it is inevitable that one's thoughts turn to another day and another age.

1. Krishnan, R. and Balam, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 129–138.
2. Yadugiri, V. T., *Curr. Sci.*, 2011, **100**, 409–415.
3. Narayan Rao, C. R., *Curr. Sci.*, 1933, **1**, 335–337.
4. Ramaseshan, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 1994, **67**, 633–636.

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