

I am honoured to introduce the *Journal of Scientific Temper*, a peer reviewed quarterly that we were planning to bring out for long. Intellectuals from across the world have come together to form its Editorial Board. I must express my gratitude to each member of the board for extending support in identifying the areas of emphasis, formulating the guidelines and their willingness to identify the potential contributors and peers. A dynamic team of CSIR-NISCAIR staff members has taken the plunge to construct this platform for a serious, scholarly yet lively debate.

The blur that surrounds the idea of ‘scientific temper’ finds its parallel in expressions such as ‘democracy’, ‘citizenship’, ‘community’, ‘fraternity’, ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘heritage’, ‘spirituality’, etc. The nebulous and overarching character of such notions makes it difficult to circumscribe these into straightjacketed definitions, which are independent of variations in time and space. As social, cultural or economic parameters on time-space curve change, meanings of these notions, within intellectual discourse as well as for common public, also change.

In order to emphasise the point let me take the example of history of ‘Enlightenment’. Grayling gives an overview of 300 years of transformation in ‘Enlightenment values’¹. He argues that in eighteenth-century France, aggressive anti-clericalism was a form of secularism. As the ‘intrusive and oppressive priestcraft’ withered away from the west, both content and form of secularism changed. It assumed a neutral meaning that is, ‘separation of church and state’, a significantly less ‘hostile’

¹ Grayling, AC, (2008), Introduction, The Enlightenment, in The Britannica Guide to the ideas that made the modern world, the people, philosophy, and history of the Enlightenment, pp ix-xxix.

notion. As the ideas travelled to other parts of the world, especially when they encountered multi-religious societies, the word 'church' was replaced by 'religion'. In the process the 'hostility' was further diluted.

Grayling further emphasizes that during this period secular individuals and groups did not assume the nomenclature 'atheist' to define their ideological position vis-à-vis religion, instead they used the term 'deist' for two reasons. Firstly, the evolution of species and cosmos was unknown to them at that time and there was no irrefutable basis for denial of god's existence, thus 'some sort of agency had to be invoked as historically responsible for setting the clockwork of the universe going'. Secondly, and more importantly, 'the word "atheist" then had the same kind of profoundly negative cachet that "murderer" and "rapist" does, as a result of demonization by the church of those who refused to accept its authority' (Grayling, xi). Today the word 'deist' which is 'less than a whisker away from atheism', is almost out of use and forgotten and in most countries, people do not hesitate to declare themselves as 'atheist'.

The notion of 'secularism' transmuted in content and form in Europe over the past three centuries. However, it was always closely linked to the idea of scientific enquiry, scientific method and scientific rationality. In India it went through a transformation, when it encountered a social structure, which was fractured along religious, caste, linguistic and regional identities. Secularism in the Indian context did not mean 'separation of church and state' rather, it was understood as 'State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them' (Article 15, Constitution of India). This understanding was arrived at over a period of more than hundred and fifty years of debate. A parallel debate on the importance of producing good quality science, constructing scientific institutions, issues of science communication and on science-society relationship also continued in India.

Historians inform us that the debate on importance of modern science, science education, science popularisation and science-society relationship had started in India during early 19th century, gained momentum during its second half. Phrases like ‘Modern Knowledge’, ‘Scientific Method’, ‘Western Models of investigation’, ‘Liberal and Enlightened System’ and ‘Scientific Spirit’ became part of intellectual discourse. Though, initially, this debate was limited in its reach, by the turn of the century the emerging scientific community, social reformers, media, educationists and leaders of resistance movement had started using them frequently. Gradually, these ideas seeped through the osmotic membranes of caste, class and language, and became part of the cognitive structure of the people.

As the debate matured, over the next fifty years, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru introduced the hazy idea of ‘scientific temper’. Over the next fifty years in an independent India some of the tenets of scientific temper have crystallised. However, building a scientifically tempered society remains a distant dream. The ‘cynical’ may argue that constructing an ideal scientifically tempered society is a utopian dream. The ‘romantics’ may reject the idea of constructing such a society altogether. Others may continue to trace roots of dynamic and robust democratic structures in science-society relationship debate.

During the past one and half year, CSIR-NISCAIR, along with fraternal organisations, hosted three conferences on various aspects of ‘scientific temper’. More than four hundred scholars had participated in these conferences. One of the recommendations of the conference was to launch a focussed journal, to keep alive the debate. The *Journal of Scientific Temper* promises to provide space for all shades of informed opinions.

This issue contains three research articles, one opinion article, a report of the conference and a book review. Hester du Plessis traces the history of the notion of scientific temper, places it within the context of freedom struggles in India and resistance movement against the Apartheid in South Africa and she concludes that present day South African society is

intellectually prepared to grapple with all the complexities of a notion like scientific temper.

Ren Fujun, in his article introduces us to a firm resolve of the Chinese political and scientific community to popularise science to the public. He traces the trajectory of the debate that has matured in China during the past and has led to identification of clear objectives, formulation of national and regional policies, and construction of institutions and mechanisms in China.

Subodh Mahanti's article gives an historical account of writings of nineteenth and twentieth century Indian scholars, educationists and social reformers who expressed their strong views on science-society relationship. He asserts that the idea of 'scientific temper' has its roots in pre-Nehruvian discourse. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, gave it a shape. His political acumen and perseverance influenced the policies of independent India and the state since then has remained committed to the task of spreading scientific temper among the public. Mahanti also comments on the developments that have taken place in the recent past.

The first volume is a humble beginning and we are quite confident that with the support of readers and contributors we will be able to make a significant contribution.

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