



Science Reporter

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COMMUNICATING SCIENCE—HUGE RESPONSIBILITY

Science, despite all its fallacies and dangers, still continues to be the prime driver of progress of humankind. But by its very nature and the complexities involved therein, science also creates divisions between people—among those who know and those who do not know science, nations that have been able to harness science for their economic progress and those that still lag behind, and, of course, the digital divide that has come out into the open with the advent of the information technology age. Science communication, therefore, becomes a major instrument for empowering the masses.

Apart from informing people of the breakthroughs and advances in science and technology, of the intricacies involved in controversial issues such as Genetically Modified Foods, stem cell technology, nuclear energy and the like, a very important function of science communication is also inculcating scientific temper and a rational outlook among its citizens. When sea waters suddenly turn sweet or honey starts oozing out of the frame of a deity or, for that matter, when idols start 'drinking milk', it is the duty of the science communicator to dispel such unfounded beliefs. It is only when the country's citizens imbibe a culture of science and of scientific enquiry in all walks of life that the country can hope to register all-round development.

Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, former President of India, also recently stressed that science communication has the potential to remove the imbalances created due to science and bring happy and prosperous order in the nations and societies across the world. He said this while delivering his inaugural address, "Powerful science communication is an asset to the transformation of societies", at the 11th International Conference on Public Communication of Science & Technology organized during 6-9 December in New Delhi.

Dr Kalam said that with the proliferation of innumerable new media of communication, the time was ripe for scientists to communicate various concepts of science to the public. Today, he said, the role of science communicators is no longer limited by communication bandwidth but by imagination bandwidth.

Dr Kalam also laid great stress on the need for inspiring science teachers. A good science teacher can be a great science communicator and inspirer, he said. It is important to inject the beauty of science into the young. He cited how as a 10 year old he was himself inspired to take up aeronautics when his physics teacher, who taught him the basics of flight, made him keenly observe sea gulls flying. That the inspiration really worked can be easily gauged from the fact that the ten-year-old boy went on to become one of India's finest rocket scientists who played a major role in the country's missile and space programmes.

Finally, while setting an agenda for the International Conference, the former President stressed on the need for trebling the number of science communicators across the length and breadth of the country in multiple languages within the next three years. Dr Kalam also emphasized that just like the *Discovery Science* channel, there is a need to establish a science channel in the country that could cover a vast array of innovations, researches and interesting scientific facts.

It needs to be realized that science communication is a big responsibility—a national responsibility, which needs to be taken up in all sincerity by today's science communicators to ensure the country's progress.



Hasan Jawaid Khan

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