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VP News

Marathi Science Writers' Meet

In continuation of Vigyan Prasar's efforts to assess the state of popular science writing in different regional languages and to identify the problems faced by science communicators, a two-day meet (December 1-2, 2001) was organised in Mumbai. Earlier, similar workshops were held in Allahabad, Agartala, Dibrugarh and Manipal. The workshop at Mumbai was jointly organised by Vigyan Prasar and Marathi Vidyan Parishad (MVP), Mumbai. Nearly 60 science communicators from different parts of Maharashtra participated in the workshop. A number of eminent science communicators attended the workshop. The workshop was inaugurated by Shri M.V. Kamath, a veteran journalist, and the President of Vigyan Prasar Society. The key-note address was delivered by Dr. Bal Phondke, a prolific science writer and former Editor of *Science Today* and former Director, National Institute of Science Communication. Dr. V.B. Kamble, Acting Director, Vigyan Prasar made a brief presentation of the activities of Vigyan Prasar. Shri A.P. Deshpande, Honorary Secretary, MVP, talked about various activities of MVP, one of the leading science organisations for popularisation of science in the country. MVP was founded in 1966. Today MVP has 37 branches. VP plans to bring out the proceedings of the meet in near future. The valedictory address was delivered by Shri Prabhakar Deodhar, President, MVP. The inaugural speech of Shri Kamath and a report on the workshop are reproduced below :

Inaugural Speech of Shri M.V. Kamath*

Mr. President and distinguished invitees,

You can have no idea how proud and honoured I feel to be invited to chair the inaugural session of this august gathering of science writers. I am here today primarily in the capacity as President of Vigyan Prasar. Vigyan Prasar has been doing wonderful work in a variety of ways, much of it totally unknown to our fellow citizens. Many of you are no doubt aware of the range and magnitude of that work. For that matter I myself have been largely ignorant of the magnificent work being done in the field of science writing in Marathi under the aegis of the Marathi Vidyan Parishad. I am deeply grateful to your Honorary Secretary, Shri



A section of the audience



(From L to R) S. Mahanti, A.P. Deshpande, M.V. Kamath, Bal Phondke and V.B. Kamble

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... think scientifically, act scientifically ... think scientifically, act scientifically ... think scientifically, act...

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Looking Forward

Vigyan Prasar wishes its readers a very happy, prosperous and a peaceful 2002.

The year 2001 was remarkable for several landmark achievements in Science and Technology. We had the first global view of the genomic landscape of human beings. The surprising finding was that the difference in genomes of different races is minuscule, only 0.1 per cent, that is, 99.9 per cent of all human beings have the same DNA. This implies that there is no superior race on this planet! The Nobel for the year 2001 in Physics was given away for the achievement of Bose-Einstein condensation in dilute gases of alkali atoms. But the observation of this new state of matter had to wait for nearly seven decades after its prediction by Albert Einstein using the statistics developed by one of the makers of Modern Physics, Satyendra Nath Bose. The year 2001, incidentally marked a hundred years of the Nobel Prizes ever since they were first given away in 1901. The other news that made headlines were the advances made in the field of stem cell research and the human cloning technology.

On the other hand, the memories of the devastating earthquake of Gujarat still continue to be fresh in our minds. Even after one year, rehabilitation of a large number of affected people still seems to be a distant dream. Then came the attacks on the World Trade Centre Towers on 11 September and even before we could reconcile with it, we were faced with the threat of anthrax attacks. The last straw was the attack on our parliament on 13 December. Indeed the year that has gone by has posed many difficult tasks and challenges before us. However, there were a few silver linings as well. Literacy in the country went up significantly. Nearly 65% of the people can read and write today, compared to 52% in 1991. More than three-fourths of the males and more than half of the females can read and write today. What is more,

there has been a net decline in the "absolute" number of illiterates during 1991-2001.

Through these columns, we have been highlighting the developments in the fields of science, technology and other spheres of human activity, and discuss their possible impact on our lives. We have also been raising pertinent issues from time to time – be it disaster preparedness / management, ways and means to tackle bio-terrorism, the role of science communicators in literacy campaigns and so on. There is no gainsaying the fact that science and technology must be employed for improvement of the quality of life - be it in the field of social and economic growth, literacy and education, higher production of food grains, or rehabilitation of those affected by natural calamities.

If we had a few events that were truly exciting during 2001, there were a few that almost changed our lives and mode of thinking through extremist acts. Such behaviour, irrational and unscientific as it is, does not benefit anyone. It can only take us backwards. Such acts, whatever the form, must be condemned and not allowed to repeat. We do hope that the science communicators and the members of the VIPNET Clubs help people see reason, and think rationally. Only then shall we be able to meet the challenges posed by the year gone by and look forward to a tomorrow that would bring us peace and prosperity.

We thank our readers for their continued support and interest. Indeed it is a joy to receive a letter from a young reader from Kerala who finds articles in *Dream-2047* inspiring, or a teacher in a remote village of Orissa who translates the articles in Oriya for his students! This is a powerful medium through which we would like to interact and exchange ideas / views with you. Please do write to us.

□ **V.B. Kamble**

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