

20 November 1999

The Editor  
Current Science  
C.V. Raman Avenue, P.B. No. 8001  
Bangalore 560 080

Dear Sir

The Editorial in the 10 November 1999 issue was apparently provoked by the article on *From Auschwitz to Indian Science* in the same issue. One specific point in the article was that the unpleasantness of discussing the mass annihilation of human beings is circumvented by altering the vocabulary of discourse, for instance, from kilodeaths that would result from nuclear explosions to the superficially innocuous kilotonnes yield. After all, one can brag about achieving a far higher explosive yield than what foreigners believed us capable of, but one cannot boast to one's family saying "They thought we could only kill a hundred thousand with our bomb, but we can actually kill a million!" Such a differential treatment was illustrated in the article by a reference to a scientific journal (changed at the suggestion of the Editor to the explicit mention of *Current Science*) publishing kilotonne yields and rejecting kilodeath estimates.

However, the implicit complaint in the article was, not that official/government estimates were published, but that counter views on the yield of the May 15 1998 Pokhran II tests were not elicited and revealed. In doing so, *Current Science* behaved like a BARC house journal, rather than as an independent *Nature*-like forum (envisaged by Raman) facilitating discourse and discussion and encouraging scientists to "express an opinion that is contrary to what is perceived as an accepted establishment view." There seemed to have been no memory of what happened to genetics in the Stalinist era through the suppression of views counter to those of Lsyenko.

The editorial has done a great service in raising fundamental questions regarding the importance of debate and differences of opinion. Worries about the possible damage to Indian science are totally misplaced – if the fabric of science in India is fragile, it is precisely because of the absence of disagreement and controversy. Dis sent is an essential condition for the health of science. Thesis, *anti-thesis* and synthesis are essential for the dialectical process of approaching truth.

The editorial also proceeds to justify on grounds of lack of originality the rejection of the paper estimating the kilodeaths that would result from a Hiroshima-type bomb on Mumbai. That is matter for the author to dispute, but what needs to be pointed out here is that the journal does publish papers, classified as lectures, that show little evidence of originality and refereeing, often when they emanate from “eminent” persons.

More importantly, it is a political decision to publish, or not to publish, a paper estimating the possible destruction of human life in an Indian metropolis from the use of nuclear weapons in the midst of euphoria over Pokhran II. Unfortunately, in that context, *Current Science* showed more concern for safety rather than for its mission of spreading truth and awareness.

Yours sincerely

Amulya Reddy