



Book Review

C V Raman and the Press: Scientific Reporting and Image Building

(Part III: The Raman Research Institute Period)

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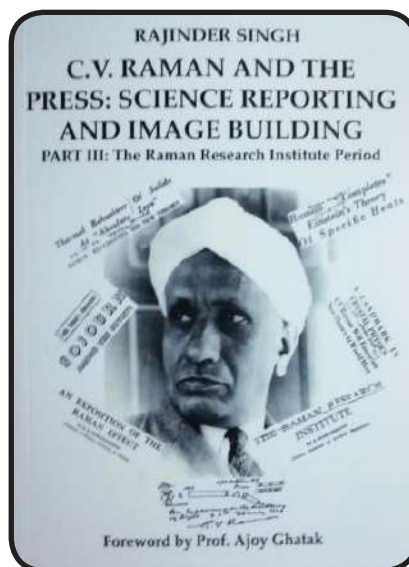
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The present book is the third and the last part of the trilogy entitled “C V Raman and the Press: Science Reporting and Image Building.” It chronicled Raman’s last phase of service career at the Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bangalore during 1948-1970. The first and the second parts of the sequel profiled his life in Calcutta (1917-1933) and Bangalore(1933-1948).



Dr. Rajinder Singh is an acclaimed biographer, who documented vibrant biographical profiles of eminent physicists of India. He has made extensive research on life and history of one of the most extraordinary scientists Sir C V Raman by contributing over 20 articles and 6 books. The epilogue of this series provided fascinating new and never before published personal details of the great genius. His life story was very complex and multifaceted, which people around him failed to comprehend and acknowledge.

In Calcutta he joined as an officer of Indian Financial Service in 1907, but his scientific traits guided him to join the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS), where he initiated serious

scientific research during his spare time. The academic ambience of IACS provided him golden opportunity to conceptualize his epoch making discovery, the Raman's Effect. In 1917, he was offered the First Palit professor of physics at the Calcutta University. Though the scientists worked under great financial constraints during colonial period, yet their achievements like M N Saha's ionization equation in 1920, S N Bose's Bose-Einstein Statistics in 1924 and CV Raman's Effect in 1928 put the Calcutta group of scientists on the world map of scientific excellence. The city of Calcutta witnessed exciting era of scientific recognition during this decade. The "History of the Calcutta School of Physical Sciences", authored by Purabi Mukherji and Atri Mukhopadhyay (Springer, 2018), has provided vivid picture of combined contributions made by the greatest physicists of India and the financial constraint under which they worked during this period.

In 1929, the Calcutta University sponsored Raman's Europe tour to make his discovery known to the global scientific community. He visited many countries and delivered extensive lectures on Raman's Effect. He established close alliance with local press, which made incredibly wide-ranging impact. C V Raman received the Noble Prize for Physics in 1930. He was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society, London in 1924 for his work on acoustics. He was Knighted by the British Government in 1929. He was an impatient scientist full of ambition and in hurry to achieve quick success. He maintained close liaison with local media including radio to keep public aware of his research activities. In due course of time he developed strained relation and serious disagreement with his colleagues in Calcutta, where he spent over 25 years.

In 1933 CV Raman was appointed as the first Indian Director of the Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), Bangalore with a great enthusiasm. It was expected that his leadership will be able to bring a leap forward for scientific progress in the country. He established the School of Physics at Bangalore and in 1934 he founded the Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS) and started publishing its proceedings. But soon his dominating personality and emotional outburst created unbearable controversy. He was not very comfortable with the government rules and regulations. Finally he had to relinquish the position of Director of IISc in July 1937. However, he continued as the professor of physics till his retirement in 1948. He was the only Indian scientist, who was honoured as the Life-Time National Professor in 1948 by the Government of India.

After his retirement, he joined the newly built institute named after himself, the Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bangalore. From 1948 to 1970 (till his death) he was the Director of RRI, and the President of the IAS. Raman was an influential man and the land which was once donated for the IAS was later turned into the campus of IAS and RRI. The IAS also financially sponsored for the building of RRI and this was possible as he was the President of the Association. His position as President of IAS, allowed him to set rules and regulations, which fitted to his requirements. Raman represented an ideal example of the exploitation of power and position.

At the RRI he did research in the field of crystal physics, crystal optics and mineralogy. He developed well equipped laboratory and made richest collection of diamond in the world through the donation from his well wishers. He started his research work with 7 scholars, but by 1950 all of them left the institute and he was left alone with the support of a technical assistant and a typist. It is difficult to comprehend, why forthcoming scientists were not fascinated to work under the guidance of a dynamic Noble Laureate?

The last decade of his life was rather lonely and frustrating which perhaps made him more eccentric, stubborn and irrational. During this time he worked on physiology of vision. He propounded a new theory in this field and he denounced earlier findings by eminent global experts. He also gave repeated Presidential Lectures at Annual Meetings of IAS and various other platforms for exposition of his new doctrine. He interacted intensively with the local media which glorified his research as a revolutionary discovery, which might fetch another Noble Prize to his credit. The press reported his every observation without understanding the validity of facts. It was also published in the Memoires of RRI and copies of which were sent to prominent scientists in abroad. But his new concept was criticized and discarded by global experts.

Raman submitted a paper on the physiology of vision for its publication in the Proceedings of the Royal Society of London, but the same was rejected. On account of which he resigned from the Fellowship of the Royal Society, London in 1964.

In fact the affairs of IAS were a one man show and he had full authority to elect Fellows from India and abroad. He used its annual meetings and other functions as the platform to establish close network with world scientific community by offering them elected and Honorary Fellowship and extending them personal favour on different occasions.

In 1953 the Silver Jubilee of Raman's Effect was celebrated with great warmth. In 1954, four eminent personalities of India C. Rajagopalachari, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Bhagwan Das, and C.V. Raman were awarded for the first time the highest civilian award, Bharat Ratna. But Raman refused to attend the ceremony, and according to one of his close relative, he smashed the Bharat Ratna medallion given to him by the Nehru Government with a hammer. Further, in 1957 he won the Lenin Peace Prize from the Russian Government, which he cordially accepted and attended the ceremony in Moscow along with his wife.

The author of the trilogy has done a sensitive task by drawing an enlightening picture of C V Raman with great care and honesty. He has enumerated every scientific accomplishment of the illuminating genius. At the same time we must realize that he was a human being and not an idol. He also had his own personality trait through which he created an atmosphere of intellectual dominance around him. The series of three parts are recommended for general readers and students who are interested to explore untold story of a man who believed in freedom to express his creativity.

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