

Man, Animal and Science

15 Sep 2011

Welome and Remarks

Prof Tandon, Prof Bamji, Dr. Chinny Krishna, Fellows of the Academy, distinguished speakers and participants of this meeting I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to this discussion meeting on Man, Animal and Science on behalf of the Indian National Science Academy and on my own behalf.

Genesis

As many of you are aware the Academy is actively pursuing a 'Science and Society Programme'. Prof Bamji has provided a wonderful leadership as Vice President. In the recent past deliberations have been held on important issues like "Micro-nutrients" and "Water". The ICMR has initiated action on the document on Micronutrients submitted by the Academy.

As we know a few months ago the Department of Environment and Forests had announced that the Act on Animal Welfare is proposed to be amended and sought suggestions. The Academy was not specifically contacted. However, we had constituted a Committee under the chairmanship of Prof KK Talwar and had submitted our recommendations.

Use of animals in medical research and drug development is an essential component before the knowledge and products can be allowed for human use. Also, for education in universities and medical institutions animals are used in India and all over the world. The issue of welfare of animals is of great importance.

In 1990s the first legal framework for animal welfare was established through the first ever Act of Parliament. This Academy provided the scientific input and the act was largely based on this. The Act was sometimes ago and the scientific community provided its inputs. In recent times serious apprehensions have been expressed about the treatment of animals in the "Animal Houses". Several national and international voluntary organizations are not in favour of use of animals in laboratories. Unfortunately the debates between the "pro—" and "anti—" groups are quite acrimonious at times. Also, R&D work has also suffered sometimes. This issue has attracted a lot of attention of the media.

At international level also this issue has taken very serious forms. Active scientists have suffered at the hand of activists who oppose usage of animals for research. Several laboratories have been damaged. This has led to 'law and order' problems. Some much so that laws have enacted to safeguard scientists and protect laboratories from vandalism. Fortunately we do not have such problems.

Efforts are also being made to develop techniques for non-animal testing of drugs and pharmaceuticals and research purposes.

In this backdrop the academy decided to organize this meeting for discussing scientific issues, actions needed to comprehensively safeguard the welfare of the animals that are needed for research, testing and teaching. Attempt has been made to invite persons, who are deeply concerned and associated with these issues, even though they may have opposing views. We have also invited an important authority on legal and ethical issues, Justice Ranganathan. Similarly, the media has graciously accepted our invitation and liked the idea of such a meeting. Shri H. K. Dua a well known leader in media showed keen interest and even suggested the title of the meeting. Scientists are used to precise titles. He will be with us during the panel discussion. Shri Pallav Bagla, a very active science journalist is one of the participants.

We are also planning to bring out a report on this issue.

The issue of man and other living beings is at the centre of Indian spiritual thought and practice, be it Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism. For example in Bhagavadgeeta Lord Krishna while defining the attributes of "Pandits", the learned experts had said in the fifth Chapter:

विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।

शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शिनः ।।१८।।

श्रीमदभगवद्गीता, ५ अध्याय

or

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम् ।

विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति ।।२७।।

श्रीमदभगवद्गीता अध्यायः १३

But these are mere recitations if we do not follow these in letter and spirit.

Several of my friends have worked hard to organize this meeting. I am particularly grateful to Prof PN Tandon, past President, Prof K. K. Talwar, Prof YK Gupta, Prof Murlidhar, Prof Bamji, Shri SK Sahni and all members of the Committee that worked tirelessly for several months, Dr A Moitra, Shri Sunil Zokarkar and colleagues from INSA. In the end thank you all for making this endeavour a success.