

Note on the Bhatnagar award for Biology 1965

The Expert Committee for this award met on Wednesday 4th October in Dr. B.P. Pal's office in Krishi Bhavan. I wish to make a few comments on it.

I wish to reiterate my observations regarding the composition of the Committee, the manner in which the proposals were made and generally the weakness in the entire machinery set up for making the award. These observations were made in a letter I sent to the Secretary, CSIR. In any case, I am enclosing a copy.

However, I was struck by the unpreparedness of the Committee to meet the requirements set upon it. This was specially clear with reference to the candidate chosen. Not one of the members of the Committee, except Professor Sadasivan, had real first hand knowledge of the area in which the candidate had made most of his contributions. There was vague talk of one or the other members of the Committee "having known him well", of the candidate having served in a certain organization which was presided over by one of the other members of the Committee, of the claim of one of the members having "made him" (the candidate) and so on, - general comments regarding his suitability, his brilliance etc. but almost none of them pointed in the direction set out by the terms of the award. For, no one amongst us, except Prof. Sadasivan, could truthfully testify that the candidate had made, during the past 5 years, "conspicuously important contributions to human knowledge". I could not claim to do so, and so far as I saw no one else could, either.

Under the circumstances, the decision arrived at on Wednesday was based on (a) complete reliance on the testimony of

Prof. Sadasivan in regard to the competence of the candidate, and (b) general, vague and diffuse observations in regard to the candidate's suitability, based on acquaintance or friendship with him knowledge of him as a past colleague or employee. At least one person did not know him at all. And one other, Dr. Randhawa, was in such a hurry to be done and get over with it that his impatience was most marked.

I am wondering, is this the way we scientists should discharge our responsibilities? This is not a small award. The previous Education Minister spoke of it as the "Nobel Prize" of this country. Even making abundant allowance for the hyperbole, surely it is necessary, instead of dismissing my observations on the composition of the Committee in the casual manner I think it was done, to organise this such that not only fairness was done but was going to be done. We are entering an era in this country when scientists will be called upon to manage their own affairs and it is necessary we display the greatest circumspection, fairness, judgment and courage in the discharge of our responsibilities. We have been quick to blame our administrators in the past but as it is necessary we see that they don't ridicule us in the future.

This is not to be constructed as my going back on the decision we took on Wednesday; that decision will stand. I am expressing my fears & doubts in regard to the discharge of our responsibilities.

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