

off Tamil Nadu. Close reading between the lines of the BJP manifesto suggests that the import of light water reactors from USA, Russia and France could be in for a major reassessment.

Yet there seems to be unanimity among most mainstream parties in accepting that India cannot abandon its pursuit of fission power; so the country's abiding love affair with the power of the atom remains steadfast.

Science does matter

While S&T may not form part of the daily vitriol that is spewed in election speeches, Indian scientists need not despair – at least among the 'big two' of the political spectrum, S&T does matter. The Indian National Congress in its manifesto may not have found enough space for S&T, but its leaders say they still believe in the sage advice of Jawaharlal Nehru who said 'it is science alone

that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy ... the future belongs to science and those who make friends with science.' But undoubtedly, the youth of today seeks to hear a more catchy tune; hence the BJP manifesto which has the stamp of the physicist from Allahabad University, Murli Manohar Joshi, Chairman of its Manifesto Committee boldly states 'India innovates and India leads'.

Manifestos by political parties indeed have to be taken seriously. In 1998, those who did not take the BJP manifesto with all its seriousness were taken aback when on 11 and 13 May 1998, India exploded a series of nuclear bombs and declared itself a 'nuclear weapons state'. In Chapter 8 of its 1998 manifesto, the BJP had written '[it would] Re-evaluate the country's nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons.' Unfortunately most had not bothered to read the fine print of the manifesto.

But when finally the dust settles, undoubtedly the true winners in the highly charged 2014 elections are the voters who cast their ballots on the crowning glory of Indian S&T the simple brief case sized EVM that has become the hallmark of clean and fair elections. The dance of the Indian democracy truly powered by far reaching Indian frugal innovations!

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The inclusion of science in election manifestos

The guest editorial 'Science and the missing manifestos'¹ talks about the absence of inclusion of science, technology, environment, agriculture and medicine (STEAM) in election manifestos of various political parties aspiring to get elected in the general elections of 2014 in India. However, the guest editorial does not do justice to the manifestos, and falters on the homework on various aspects discussed therein.

The absence of a comparison on STEAM in one of the leading newspapers mentioned by Balasubramanian¹ does not mean that the manifestos lack a description of the same. At least two leading political parties aspiring to form the next government at the national level have clear science and technology (S&T) policy (note that in S&T, I have included STEAM). One of them aspires to increase the S&T budget to 2% of the national GDP. Another party intends to establish an intellectual property repository and rural technology institutions. Needless to say, these manifestos are drafted by intellectuals and perhaps we should treat them with respect.

Most importantly, India is considered a food adequate country (although it is

debatable whether this food is available to all equally). This has important implications in the shift in economic policy 'from a gamble in monsoon to a gamble in the market'². Balasubramanian¹ further adds that no words have been mentioned with regard to agriculture and that the seeds for development in this direction were sown in 1950s; whence I should like to push the date to 1920s (ref. 3). However, immediately upon attaining independence, India was busy undoing what the British had done⁴. In this process, we not only pushed ourselves back scientifically but economically as well. Perhaps independence in the present context is best defined as a change of governance from the British crown to Indian political parties.

However, what needs to be the prerogative of policy advisors is that we have constituencies like Malkajgiri, Ranga Reddy District dubbed the largest constituency in the country. Malkajgiri has a total electorate of approximately three million voters and elects one Member of Parliament. On the contrary, New Zealand has a population of four million⁵ and elects 70 representatives; thereby hangs a tale.

In addition to what is mentioned here and in the guest editorial¹, abandonment of manifestos by political parties is even more worrisome. This has its basis in the observation that a number of political parties have pre-poll alliances with more post-poll alliances in the offing. This attitude is not healthy in the long run for S&T in general, and for the nation in particular.

1. Balasubramanian, D., *Curr. Sci.*, 2014, **106**, 1047–1048.
2. Swaminathan, M. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**(7), 886–895.
3. C. N. A., *Curr. Sci.*, 1939, **8**(03), 141–142.
4. Shashi Kant and Berry, R. A. (eds), *Institutions, Sustainability and Natural Resources Sustainability, Economics and Natural Resources*, Springer, The Netherlands, 2005, vol. 2, pp. 83–113.
5. *The Little Data Book*, The World Bank, Washington DC, USA, 2007.

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