

Letters to the Editor

January 12, 2018

My Dear Professor S C Roy and Dr. Rajinder Singh

I read your article “Coming of Age: Bose Institute under D.M. Bose” published in the Nov-Dec 2017 issue of Science and Culture with great interest. It is a beautiful piece of work on ‘History of science’ in India in general and the story of Bose Institute under Professor D M Bose in particular. Many thanks for such a wonderful exposition of the subject. However, on page 367, last paragraph, you have mentioned the following;

“DMB was a member of the committee which recommended the formation of the Atomic Energy Commission. In May 1946, members of AEC decided on the important operational strategies for future atomic research programmes in India. One such strategy was — _____”.

Actually, till the ‘Great War II’ was over, the work on Atomic Energy was the most guarded secret. The war had ended with the dropping of ‘Atomic Bombs’ on August 6, 1945 at Hiroshima and on August 9, 1945 at Nagasaki, and consequent surrender of Japan. Moreover, India itself got freedom on August 15, 1947. Therefore, I was just wondering that during ‘British Rule’ in India in **May 1946**, could it be possible to recommend the formation of any such committee on Atomic Research !

As per the archival records available in the Department of Atomic Energy, soon after India got freedom, “Board of research in Atomic Energy” was constituted on **August 26, 1947** with Dr. Homi Bhabha as its Chairman. Bhabha had put up a note to Prime Minister Nehru on **April 26, 1948**, recommending the ‘Organization of Atomic Research in India’, and the necessary ‘administrative measures’ required. The ‘Atomic Energy Act’ was passed by the Parliament on **August 10, 1948**, and consequently the ‘Atomic Energy Commission’ was set up with Dr. Homi Bhabha as its Chairman and Dr. S.S. Bhatnagar and Dr. K.S. Krishnan as its members. And further story continued hereafter.

I have very recently gone through all these details. I thought of sharing these details with you. May be you could have a look at it.

Many thanks. With love and my personal warm regards.

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Author S. C. Roy replies

Dear Dr. Sharma,

I was delighted to note that you have read our article on Bose Institute during D.M. Bose’s period with interest and initiated some interesting discussion. It is true that Atomic Energy Commission was established in 1948. But prior to this ground work for the formation of Atomic Energy Commission has been started in 1945 through the Atomic Energy Committee. I am giving below the brief history of nuclear research in India as has been narrated in detail by Robert Anderson in his book “Nucleus and Nation” published by The University of Chicago Press (2010), pp. 120-121. I quote

“In this context, well before India was an independent nation, scientists formed the Atomic Energy Committee in 1945. Clearly with official knowledge, it had Bhatnagar as its secretary and the CSIR as source of its funds. The committee supported nuclear research and allocated money through the closely allied Atomic Energy Research Board. Meeting in Bombay, the committee and board were chaired by Homi Bhabha; other committee members were Saha, of Calcutta; Krishnan, of Allahabad; and Bose, of Calcutta. This was the ground work for the Atomic Energy Commission founded in 1948.All this occurred prior to the testing of atomic bombs in New Mexico in July and prior to the bombs dropping on Japan in August 1945. Indians in India, forming a nucleus of expert advocates, thus had an advanced grasp of the potential power of the nucleus of the Uranium atom”

I also verified this in the Annual Report of Bose Institute. In the Annual Report of BI for the year 1945-46, it reads;

“An Atomic Research Committee has recently been formed by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research, India and it is expected that the Bose Institute will take an

important part in investigations sponsored by the Committee”.

In the Annual Report of Bose Institute for the year 1946-47, we find:

“The institute received grant from the CSIR for atomic research. It has been invited to submit a long term scheme for atomic research. It has been proposed to continue for the present such atomic investigations to the fissionable properties of the nuclei of the heavy atoms like Uranium, Thorium etc. with a view to the utilization of energy released in atomic piles built up of fissionable metals, for the purpose of industrial development, also it is proposed to utilize the radioactive fission products as trace elements for biological investigations”.

As you see D.M. Bose was a member of the Atomic Energy Committee which formed the Atomic Energy Commission. And in 1946 strategies for further nuclear research had been decided.

I hope you will find this information useful.

With best regards,

Suprakash

Sharma replies

My dear Professor Suprakash C Roy,

Many thanks for such a detailed narration of the events during 1945-46 before the formation of Atomic Energy Commission in India after Independence. I am indeed obliged to you for all this research and your quote from the book of Robert Anderson. I had only heard about this author but never read it . This information is very important and very much useful to me as well. Many thanks once again.

With love and my personal warm regards.

Narendra

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