

## POPULAR SCIENCE TO PEOPLE SCIENCE IN BENGAL

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**T**ruly, modern science was practically 'alien' to common people since its triumphant uprise in the 16th century through 19th century. If we trace back the glorious path of the history of sciences, we find the glittering names of the unfathomable talents like Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Pasteur, Darwin, Einstein, Hisenbug and so on — as if 'science' was not the matter of common people or general mass, it was simply not their affair anyway. Things changed gradually, step by step, during the last two centuries, throughout the world.

In India, historically, the importance and application of modern science and education emerged during the 19th and the first part of 20th century chiefly under the colonial guidance of British Rule. The term "popular science" was unfamiliar at that time only because people in general had nothing to do with 'science'. So far as Bengal is concerned we find only a handful of eminent scientists and writers to be actually inclined to express the content and concept of science in popular form in Bengali language. Memorable persons like Akhshay Kumar Datta, Ramendrasundar Tribedi, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Jagadananda Roy, Satyendranath Bose were there. Their sincere efforts to bring down the established science from the ivory tower to the grass and meadows of people's language were undoubtedly honest, but effectively none of them was found to be active in organizing popularization of science among common mass, or in getting people involved in 'popular science activities' in a big way. Prof Satyen Bose pioneered the venture of popularization of science in mother tongue just at the wake of Independence of India. In 1948 he founded Bangiya Bigyan Parishad with a mission to encourage regular culture of science in Bengali, the language of the soil.

In subsequent years, during 50s and 60s, a movement gradually developed with the initiative of a section of

educated class in West Bengal through encouragement in practice of reading and writing science, beyond academic periphery, and also through model making, poster displaying, rendering health services to the community, through arranging lectures and debates on various science topics in a more-or-less amateurish way. Small science clubs were formed at both the urban and suburban localities. Thus a 'science club movement' became quite popular in Bengal during 60s onwards where mostly youths and students ( both science and non-science students ) got themselves involved in it.

Even then, looking at those activities critically, it was found that the basic alien character of science from common people was still prevailing, and did not change much, as those science programmes could not intimately touch the day-to-day life of people. Only collecting and presenting information of technological achievements, highlighting fascinating functions of applied sciences, and focusing God-like magical efficacy of high-tech devices could not produce much impact on the consciousness of mass as a whole. That was the distinct feature of alienation. People in general did not get involved spontaneously with science or scientific principles, but only to be amazed at the brilliance of science and technology — shining above their heads.

Thereafter, since seventies, this scenario started to change towards a new dimension; a new wave called 'People Science Movement' or PSM developed overcoming the existing 'Popular Science'. In West Bengal, in particular, this change or development was likely to have been related to the revolutionary turmoil in radical political activities shaking the social, cultural & ideological frame of the society. At this time, almost simultaneously, novel pro-people science movements also appeared in several other Indian states — steered by non-political organizations-like Kerala Shastra Shahitya Parishad (KSSP) in South India, Lokavigyan Sangathan in Maharashtra, Kishore Bharati in

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