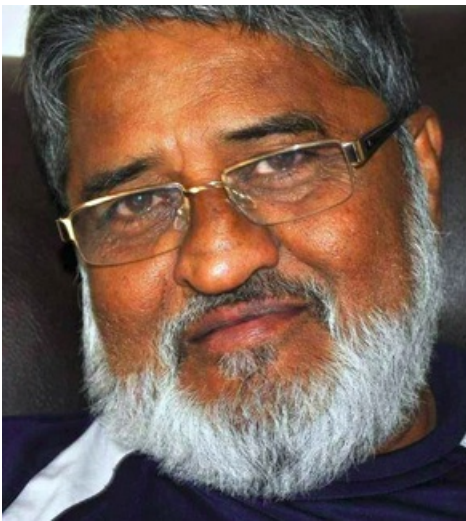


A personal journey in science journalism Rex D'Rozario

By [Eklavya](#) | Jan 20, 2017

Rex D' Rozario was not a scientist. Nor was he a science graduate. When it comes to the most influential science journalists, his is a revered name. He was with *Kishore Bharati*, a [Prof Anil Sadagopal](#)'s initiative. Having blazed a trail in [Hoshangabad Vigyan Bulletin](#) (a newsletter which was a precursor to the immensely popular children's magazine *Chakmak*), he worked with [Eklavya](#), *Science Today* & *Science Age*. As a member of the [National Focus Group](#) on Teaching of Science, his (& other like-minded thinkers') inputs in the drafting the seminal [NCF 2005](#) was a watershed moment in science teaching. He also worked with the *Times of India* & the *Khaleej Times*. He passed away on 19th January, 2017 in Houston, USA.



The Teachers of India pays tribute to him & fondly excerpts this wonderful article (from www.arvindguptatoys.com) he wrote for the commemorative issue of [Sandharbh](#), where he reminisces about the trajectory science journalism took since the 70s. Teachers can find parallels in the evolution of science reporting in the media and science teaching on ground. You may read the Hindi version of the same [here](#).

~ Editor

When Rajesh Khindri (Editor, *Sandharbh*) suggested I write an article for this commemorative issue of *Sandharbh*, I had no hesitation in saying 'yes' but soon realised I knew little about the subject he wanted me to write about– the history of science journalism in India - despite my being a 'science' journalist (I'm an 'arts' graduate) for the better part of 35 years. An internet search got me a government-eye view of science journalism in post-independence India so I thought, why not just go in for an anecdotal recollection of my experiences in - exclusively English and Hindi - science journalism, which, perhaps, makes the history a little 'blinker' and lopsided , considering the legacy of other regional language s and other players.

Anyway, here goes ... and I hope you, the reader, can stay interested and fill in the gaps, keeping in mind a qualifying clarification: I take a broad-based view of 'science journalism' in the sense that I include media other than print in the concept and means other than publications to popularise science and cultivate a scientific outlook among people.

I'd classify my sojourn in science journalism into three periods – streams actually, since they run concurrently - commercial print journalism, 'activist' journalism, and the electronic/digital phase - television and the internet. The thread connecting the three phases is the government presence, which funded major print and electronic media initiatives in keeping with the Nehruvian thrust of spreading scientific temper in Indian society.

Science journalism in the commercial print media

Let me begin with my gurus in science journalism, both deceased: Surendra Jha, editor of *Science Today* , and Pradip Paul, assistant editor. Jha was the guy who visualised the format of the magazine and sold the idea to the *Times of India* group as a young 35-year-old in the mid-1960s. He networked with scientists in laboratories across India to build up a stable of scientist-writers, many of whom couldn't write for a popular audience, their contributions reading more like quasi-research papers. Paul made their science readable and taught us

how to do this. Together, they built *Science Today* into a beacon of popular science journalism – in English - in post-independence India.

There was also the government-published [Science Reporter](#) (and its Hindi edition [Vigyan Pragati](#)) but we didn't take those efforts seriously in those days, although the *Science Today* effect did rub off on them under a later editor who made them more readably informative.

The *Science Today* effect lasts to this day. I've come across people who grew up with the magazine, which spawned a love of science in them that influenced their higher study and career choices. That's why I rank *Science Today* as India's best science magazine before subsequent editors took it on a quasi-science trajectory. It popularised cutting edge science – computers, lasers, nano- technology, rocket science, quantum physics, crystallography, biotechnology – making the work of scientists in laboratories understandable to generations of students battling with curriculum-based science.

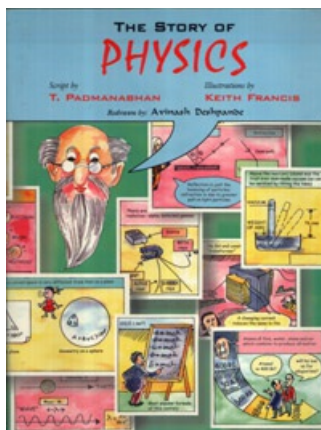
I remember Jha once telling me about a comment made by the editor of *New Scientist* , the resource-rich British publication that was, arguably, the most popular science journal globally of the time (not to be compared with *Nature*, a research-based magazine with a readership within the science community).

The editor was truly amazed that such a versatile publication featuring frontier science could emerge from a resource-poor country like India.

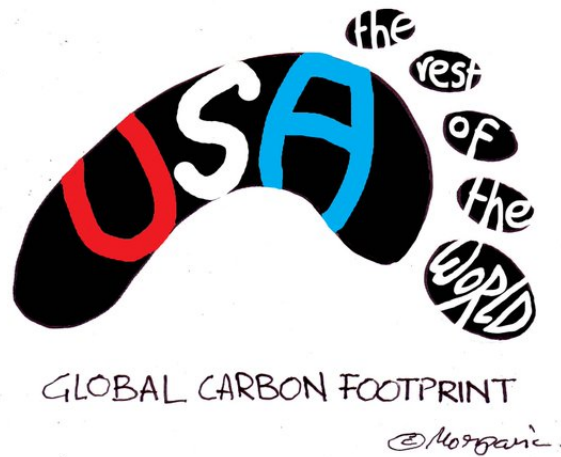
Jha left *Science Today* to found and edit *Science Age*, the second important science magazine in post-independence India in my estimation. His departure underlined the fact that popular science journalism was a non-starter commercially because advertisers did not buy the idea - *Science Today* shut shop in 1992 even though its circulation was nearing 100,000. I worked with Jha for a little over a year in his new venture in the late 1980s. *Science Age* wasn't altogether commercial, the [Nehru Science Centre in Worli, Mumbai](#) underwriting its production expenses. Yet it was another losing battle Jha fought, the magazine surviving for a brief lifetime with little advertisement support, never achieving viability.

Science Age was a step ahead of *Science Today* in some respects. Jha brought his imagination into greater play when interpreting science by getting poet Adil Jussawala to join the editorial team and write about matters scientific. (That imagination – shared by Paul - was also reflected in the cover illustrations of both magazines - mind-blowing in their conceptualisation, use of artistic media, colour, without doubt, the finest examples of cover art in science journalism anywhere in the world.)

Another innovation was introducing the comic book format to narrate science stories. T. Padmanabhan, a theoretical physicist, penned '[The Story of Physics](#)' while Keith Francis did the illustrations.



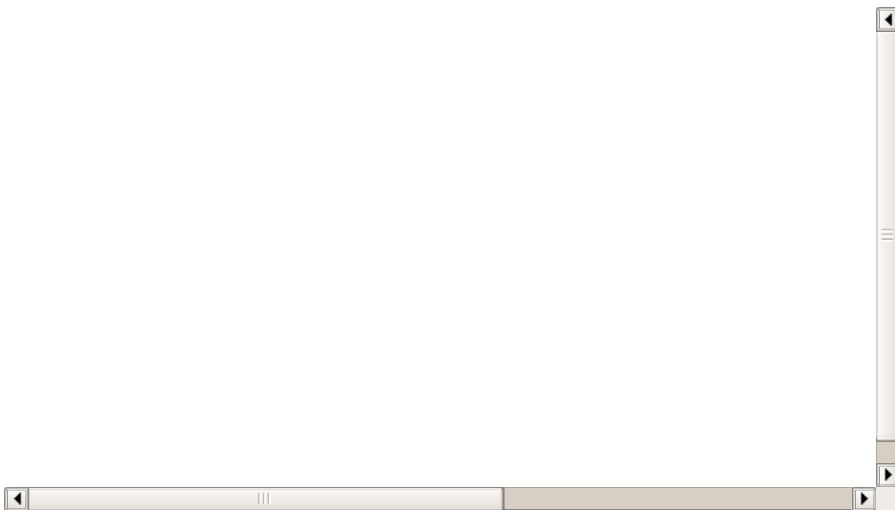
It was a classic series, with the touch of irreverence seen more strongly in the 'Idiot's Guide' and 'For Dummies' series, and minus the platitudinous, retrograde values of Amar Chitra Katha comics. (Incidentally, I later got Jha's permission to publish this comic strip in Chakmak , but couldn't find the talent with that kind of cheekiness to do the Hindi translation. Vigyan Prasar, an autonomous organisation under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), did eventually publish it in book form.) That tongue-in-cheek humour found more play in both magazines in the inimitable cartoons of Mario Miranda and Hemant Morparia, then a newly qualified medical doctor with a funny bone.



(from [Dr Hemant Morparia](#))

There's another aspect that needs mention. A left-leaning political activist in his youth, Jha used the pages of both *Science Today* and *Science Age* to give space to activists to air their views on science and technology, be it alternative technologies such as bio-gas, the social and environmental impact of building large dams, or educational initiatives such as the [Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme](#) (HSTP), at a time when such ventures were fringe activities in the public consciousness.

Story of the famous Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme meant to rejuvenate science teaching in Indian Village schools using the Activity Method and the Discovery Approach.



This questioning of research thrusts in science was more evident in *Science Age* than *Science Today*, but the trend truly gathered pace in the 'activist' phase of science journalism.

(watch this space for the Part 2)

Category: Teacher Development

Subject: Science & Technology

Board: All boards

Grade/Standard: Class 3-5
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