

## **National Conference on Creative Science Communication**

THE Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in collaboration with STEAM Academy, Mumbai organized the National Conference on Creative Science Communication on 19 February 2020 at the School of Environmental Sciences. Around 150 postgraduate, research scholars and academicians attended.

In the inaugural session, Dr Robinet Jacob, Director of Quality Assurance at MGU welcomed the gathering and outlined the objectives of the programme. Professor Sabu Thomas, Vice Chancellor and Founder-Director of International and Inter-University Centre for Nanoscience and Nanotechnology in his presidential address highlighted the importance of communication and its vital role in conveying the research findings to the stakeholders. He referred to the novel methods of science communication being developed and validated in centres of higher learning across the globe.

Professor S. Sivadas, a celebrity science communicator and the architect of the genre of Creative Science Communication was felicitated by Professor Sabu Thomas with a ceremonial shawl in celebration of his eightieth birthday. Author of more than 200 creative science books, Prof. Sivadas' latest book *We Are 118* was also released on the occasion. This book is the autobiographical narratology of 118 elements from Hydrogen to Oganesson.

Professor Sam Illingworth of Manchester Metropolitan University delivered a video scicompoeetry discourse. He is an acclaimed leader in science poetry. Based on the research publication in *Frontiers of Ecology and the Environment* titled "Rewilding of Fukushima's human evacuation zone", he composed a poem and recited it for the conference.

Dr A.P. Jayaraman, President, STEAM Academy, traced the genesis of the conference and focused attention on the global initiatives of centres of higher education in empowering research scholars in communicative competence. He noted with delight that the University is honouring Prof. S. Sivadas, the pride of

Kerala in the centenary year of Isaac Asimov, the doyen of science communication. He remarked that Prof S. Sivadas has contributed over 20 million printed words and 200 million spoken words as part of his scicom professional life.

In the first Technical Session, Dr Jayaraman gave a bird's eye view of the emerging trends in science communication and described his work in new genres of scicom. He presented the case study of the PhD dance by a research scholar at IIT-B Monash Academy about her own thesis work on Fractals. Jayaraman demonstrated how to engage children with his story *Royal Poop* which illustrates the full blown scientific method.

He demonstrated a fact fiction fusion technology story using a familiar Indian *swayamwara* folktale in order to explain reverse osmosis and desalination technology. The Ottamthullal art form was creatively used to communicate the membrane process. He gave a detailed account of a TedTalk model with his own performance on "Nuclear Masala Dosa". This brought out the convergence of physical, chemical, biological and engineering sciences into 'Dosology'.

The making of the book *We are 118* coauthored by the presenter with Prof. Sivadas was explained with the principles of creative science literature. The narratology is the autobiographical account of each element introducing itself with its striking identity, properties and present and future uses.

Dr Srinarahari, Secretary-General, Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies, delivered the Isaac Asimov Birth Centenary Lecture and presented the multidimensional activities undertaken by the IASFS. He reviewed the great landscape created by Asimov and gave a vivid picture of the writer's life complete with several anecdotes. His prolific output of 470 works on various topics was commented upon.

The themes that dealt explicitly with science fiction could be classified into two – Foundation series and Robot series – of which the latter was more popular. He also assessed the recent advancements in Science Fiction with special reference to the Indian research scenario. Highlights of the recently concluded International conference on science fiction were presented.

In the post-lunch session Prof. Nandakumar Kalarikkal from MG University delineated the pathways for research scholars to communicate with stakeholders and underscored the need of the conscious development of this vital skillset. He also underlined the importance of IPR in the context of holding hands with global transdisciplinary teams and warned all researchers that the world of scientific research is by no means 'an angel's world.'

In a specially curated interaction session on creative science literature Prof. Sivadas unfolded the story of his evolution and mastery of this genre of writing. With his warm smile and merry laugh, Prof. Sivadas effortlessly conquered the hearts of his listeners who listened spellbound to the journey of his life from the tiny hamlet of Ullala in Vaikom to the busy metropolitan cities of India and the world. Everything from the humble earthworm to even more basic structures as the elements is grist to his literary mill.

It was the popular science movement in Kerala, the Sastra Sahitya Parishad and one of its founders, Sri P. T. Bhaskara Panicker that set him firmly on the path of creative science literature. As the editor of *Sastra Keralam* and *Eureka* magazines for the young published by the Sastra Sahitya Parishad, he travelled the length and breadth of Kerala visiting the schools and delivering lectures on different aspects of science. He knew the pulse of the young and so he set out to explain the most complicated concepts in vivid and lucid style. His own signature style of telling stories to children imprinted itself in the minds of his readers.

Prof. S. Sivadas held his audience spellbound as is clear from the questions that were raised by them towards the end of the session. In answer to the question asked by a young scientist about the need for creative science literature, Prof. Sivadas replied that creative science literature is the mesmerism that draws a person to his subject so much that the subject becomes imprinted in his psyche. One finds pleasure in learning the subject because one recognises the pleasure that is embedded within the subject. One learns to recognise the importance of all things living and non-living because everything is necessary for our well being. Man and microbe make up a co-operative society where each depends upon the other. Nature and all within her

including man should be conserved and preserved for the sustenance of life. This is ecospirituality at its best and in the hands of Prof. Sivadas, the boundaries between science and literature vanish and science becomes literature.

As an appendix to the discourse of Prof. S. Sivadas, his wife Mrs. Suma Sivadas confided the inside story of everyday life with her husband. A teacher and writer in her own right, she spoke of the emotion of love that is the basic feature of the nature of Sivadas Sir. He loves everyone – the human beings around him, the birds that nest in various corners of his house, the beasts that visit his spacious garden and yard. He has a good word for all who come in contact with him. Children are drawn to him right from the smallest babe to the most unruly adolescent. He loves writing and talking and has the ability to enthral his reader and his listener. Creation of works comes easily and naturally to him; he throws himself body and soul into what he is writing. She recalled the great agony of the mind and the body that he had felt while writing the story of St. Francis and how much at peace he was after completing it. He knows his own mind and will not budge an inch from the thoughts and beliefs he holds dear.



Dr Susan Varghese in her brief summing up about the day's proceedings spoke about the effect of the four lectures that had been presented that day. She remarked that the Indian Aesthetics

of Rasa, Bhava, Dhvani which had been introduced by Sage Bharatha in his *Natysastra*, take into account the effect of the performance upon the spectator or *rasika*. She was all praise for Prof. Sivadas who had made creative science communication the most attractive vehicle of learning and understanding.

The afternoon hours sped away and the National Conference on Creative Science Communication drew to a close with a brief vote of thanks proposed by Dr V.P. Sylas.

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