

Legacy of HN: Have we forgotten it so soon?

I was distressed to know that National College, Bangalore – the institution where HN walked, talked, breathed, instilled and inculcated science and scientific thinking – has forgotten so soon the wonderful legacy left behind by him, a legacy, teachers like me, although in a different institute, will always remember. Let me elaborate on this. He believed in rational thinking in a refreshingly different way. It reminded me of the unforgettable lines in Tagore's famous poem *Where the mind is without fear*:

'Where the clear stream of reason,
Has not lost its way,
into the dreary desert sand of dead habit,
Into that heaven of freedom, My Father,
Let my country awake'.

I was once invited to give a talk in the science club he had founded 35 years ago (which had been meeting every Wednesday without a break for the same period). He could have asked one of his junior colleagues to call me. But I was over-

whelmed to receive a call from him personally even when his health was failing. As Balaram, Editor, *Current Science*, put it in his editorial tribute after HN's demise: *nobody could refuse an invitation from HN*. Not because he was aggressive in his invite, but one was overwhelmed by the fact that a man of his stature would always take the trouble of calling personally. Nobody who has got such an invite for either the science club meetings or the more prestigious yearly science symposia (which often commenced on a Sunday, if it was July 1st) will forget this act of humility, dignity and grace. Once there, I got to experience the unique HN style of introducing a speaker. It was coffee first, with HN personally sitting beside you and taking down details of your CV to introduce you. This was a humbling experience by itself for academicians like me. HN told me during this brief talk, why he wanted his students to believe more in astronomy (an exact science) rather than astrology (I do not remember why the conversation

veered towards astrology). He narrated how during one of NASA's expeditions, the landing on the moon was late by a factor of 13 minutes, instead of the exact one fixed by them. The NASA director in his report put this as an unacceptable error. That, HN said, was scientific thinking 'at its best' and he wanted his students to appreciate that. The college by allowing an organization to hold an astrology conference in the hallowed halls where the great man left such a precious legacy, has done irreparable damage to his memory. I hope it makes amends by organizing an Astronomy conference so that students and staff know the difference between an exact and fascinating science and an irrational pseudo 'science'.

V. R. SASHIDHAR

*Department of Crop Physiology,
University of Agricultural Sciences,
GKVK Campus,
Bangalore 560 065, India
e-mail: vrsashi@yahoo.com*

Erythrina gall wasp *Quadrastichus erythrinae*

The information provided by Faizal *et al.*¹ on *Erythrina* gall wasp *Quadrastichus erythrinae* is satisfactory. Two years ago I had seen this infestation on *Erythrina indica* and another species of it commonly known as 'variegated *Erythrina*'; an ornamental tree usually planted in gardens. I studied the symptoms and came to the conclusion that these galls are caused by some insect, but could not identify the causal organism.

In Maharashtra I have seen galled trees in Pune, Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur districts, and in Karnataka in Belgaum and Dharwad districts.

The infestations were serious in Maharashtra about two years ago. The severity was so acute that galled plants did not flower at all; now only the skeleton of plants with galled terminal ends of the shoot system that appear dark black are seen. Even after heavy showers during the last year, the infested plants did not produce new foliage. Whatever little was

produced got immediately attacked by the pests. For the last two years these plants have not produced flowers and fruits.

The degree of infestation is variable and may depend on species, age and habitat of the plant. The variegated *Erythrina* species is comparatively poorly infested compared to *E. indica*. The young plants are comparatively less infested than old trees and irrigated plants (growing in water channels) are heavily infested than the non-irrigated ones.

If such invasive pests infest our indigenous flora, there is great threat to our biodiversity. By now the infestation has been well established on certain trees of *Erythrina*. These plants will serve as a source of infestation and its further spread might wipe out plants in the area. In future, no seeds will be available to replant *Erythrina*.

I have another example of a hedge plant 292. *Clerodendron inerme* (Verbenaceae)

with viral infection, showing yellow mosaic symptom. The infected shoot shows slanted growth and small, mottled leaves with yellowing blotches. These plants also did not flower during this season. This is another example of a new disease in my area. This plant has medicinal properties².

1. Faizal, M. H. *et al.*, *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 1061–1062.
2. Patil, P. B. *et al.*, *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 1064–1066.

BASAVARAJ KORE

*PG Department of Botany,
Y.C.I.S.,
Satara 415 001, India
e-mail: basavaraj.kore@rediffmail.com*