

Guest Editorial

A little over fifteen years ago – in 1998 – Dr. D. Balasubramanian and Dr. N. Appaji Rao had organized a symposium in the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) titled “The Indian Human Heritage.” I was invited to this Symposium and had contributed by delivering a talk on the genetic structure of ethnic groups of India. All contributions were put together in the form of a book edited by the symposium organizers and bearing the same title as the symposium which was published by Universities Press (India) Ltd., Hyderabad. A description of the book reads, “This is a collection of articles by experts from different fields. While the focus of each article is different from the others, the common thread of the heritage of India strings them together to form a well-represented foray into various aspects of the Indian human heritage. Written by experts in their respective fields, these articles analyse the health, cultural, linguistic and sociological heritage of India.”

When the History of Science Committee of the INSA, through Dr. Balasubramanian, asked me to organize a symposium on a similar theme, I readily accepted. I wanted the canvas of the symposium to be wider; not confined to the human. Since genetics and genomics have immensely contributed to our understanding of the evolution and spread of biological species – with acknowledgement to UNESCO’s *Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights* – I felt that genomes of species represent the fundamental unity of all members of the biome and, in a symbolic sense, genomes are a global heritage. Yet I was to organize a symposium on “The *Indian* Heritage.” Genomic view it was going to be of the heritage. But if the heritage is *global*, how does India come in? I felt

that in the symposium we should discuss the evolution of genomes and genomic structures of those biological species that are considered iconic in India. Some of these species may have their places of origin in India, somewhat like the concept of “geographical indication,” but we will hear what the experts say in the symposium, I told myself.

When I started to list the “iconic species” that are possibly representative of “Indian heritage,” the list got too long! There were constraints on time and budget. Therefore, we decided to invite about a dozen experts to provide genomic views on the genomics and evolution of some iconic species. There were some last minute dropouts; and two speakers did not have the time to submit full-length manuscripts for this compendium. Abstracts of their talks are however included. Another last minute dropout was a speaker who was involved in sequencing the genome of the beautiful lotus, so widely used in various cultural activities in India. Because the lotus is so central to Buddhist and Hindu cultures – and, also for some stunning properties of this plant, such as, its seeds can remain dormant for more than a century – I decided not to give the lotus genome a pass! Therefore, I read up relevant papers and made a presentation in the symposium.

I am grateful to all those who responded to my call, and took the trouble of coming long ways to participate and deliver lectures in this symposium. I thank Dr. D. Balasubramanian, Dr. A.K. Bag, Professor Raghavendra Gadagkar, President, INSA, and the History of Science Cell of the INSA for guidance and for organizing logistical support.

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