Hundred years ago

**Surge that powered research at IISc**

Subhash Chandra N S, July 27, Bangalore:

Bangalore roared into the electric age over a century ago and lit the minds of Jamshedji Nusserwanji Tata, who in collaboration with some British academics, gave birth to the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) that now celebrates its centenary year.

It was by virtue of its enviable position as the only city in British India—and Asia—to get electric supply, that the IISc could be conceived of and turned into a reality in 1909.

The first research work at the IISc, named so by Professor Orme Masson of Melbourne University and Colonel Clibborn of Roorkee College, began under the directorship of Professor Morris W Travers, with “electro-techniques” (later renamed electrical engineering) as one of the principal departments.

At a time when industrialisation had begun to take off and power generation was still in an infant state, 66 kilowatt overhead cables would transmit power to the IISc, making possible for the then researchers to begin pioneering work.

**Commitment**

The country’s leading science research institute would never have seen the light of the day but for the Government of Mysore Electricity Department’s commitment to provide uninterrupted power supply.

According to the IISc’s archives and publication centre, three significant conditions—uninterrupted power supply, non-stop water flow and a region free from earthquakes—contributed to the institute’s emergence. “Malleswaram was on an elevated spot and satisfied the third condition. Besides, the place was water fed by supply from the Hesarghatta lake,” an IISc source told Deccan Herald. The City’s oldest pumping station, ‘Jewel Filter’, also located at Malleswaram, would provide water to a portion of Bangalore.

The archival sources are backed by Gajanan Sharma, a Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited official, who in his book, “Hundred Years of Electricity”, records the transmission of power from Shivanasamudram to Bangalore and the IISc.

The IISc archives indicate that British academics and scientists insisted on continuous supply of power and water without which research would be impossible. The initial motivation to set up a science institute here was to provide research support to industries in and around the City’s periphery. According to Sir William Ramsey, a Nobel winner for Chemistry, with whom Travers worked, had suggested that the place where the institute could come up “should be such that it is possible to work with energy during the greater part of the year; it should, if possible, be near a source of power”.

Ramsey was of the opinion that Bangalore was the best spot for the institute to come up because of its temperate climate; “it is not too hot for Europeans, nor too cold for natives”. Besides, for Ramsay, it was within “easy reach of Ootacamund (Ooty)”. Sharma said that “a committee was constituted which considered other locations like Pune, Nagpur and Roorkee where the institute could come up.” But the committee chose Bangalore for it had assured water and power supply. Of course, a land grant of 371 acres and 16 guntas by the then Mysore Maharaja Krishna Raja Wodeyar IV gave IISc its present location.

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