

## ASTRONOMY

# Scientists from all around the world will have a hand shaping our future

Tuesday, January 02, 2007

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It's popular in some circles to denigrate science on the grounds that it comes from a "white European male" world view.

But anybody who takes this argument seriously obviously hasn't spent much time with astronomers.

Even fledgling astronomers learn about the work of Chushiro Hayashi, of Japan, and Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, who was born in India and read the work of researchers from all around the world. By the time we get our degrees, we have professional contacts in a half-dozen countries. After a couple of decades, we have friends in so many places that we lose track.

My wife, Mangala Sharma, also an astronomer, and I spent last month in India. We were there primarily for a wedding, but we also e- mailed colleagues at the Raman Research Institute in Bangalore. It was just that easy to set up a visit and arrange for me to give a research seminar on galaxies.

Just because India is a developing country doesn't mean the science is second-rate. India is one of the world leaders in low-frequency radio astronomy with the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope near Pune. By the end of the day, we had the seeds of a new collaboration sown.

Bangalore is one of the major hubs of the worldwide information-technology industry. But, just like in the United States, educating the future leaders in science and engineering is a huge challenge.

A high point of our trip was our visit to a science fair for students from more than 40 of Bangalore's least-privileged public middle schools. Some of Mangala's old friends are working with corporate sponsors to organize events like these, and they invited us to come and talk with the children.

The students were bright, enthusiastic ... and they knew their stuff! They knew why Pluto isn't considered a planet anymore. They knew about the principles of energy and resource conservation. Their projects included astronomy, kidney disease and techniques for "rainwater harvesting."

And Mangala was surrounded by bright-eyed girls who were utterly thrilled to be able to meet somebody who was a scientist — and who looked like them!

"Now I'm sure I'm going to be a scientist," one said.

A few years ago, I was a guest on an earlymorning radio talk show. One lady phoned in demanding to know what I thought about "all those foreign students" she kept seeing around town.

What do I think of them? I think they're great. Just like the American students, they are our future.

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