

Editorial

Vijay Chandru, Associate Editor

This issue celebrates yet another woman scientist, Henrietta Swan Leavitt, who was the first astronomer to suggest a reliable measure of distance of a star from earth. Her fundamental technique and its implications for modern astronomy are detailed by Biman Nath in his Article-in-a-Box.



Many of us have the subconscious habit of trying to get ‘into the author’s mind’ as we read. This is particularly true of important research papers in one’s field. Vasant Natarajan makes us fully conscious of how important this aspect of reading is – by analysing Einstein’s 1917 paper on quantum theory of radiation from this perspective.

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has declared a new standard language for the web. This is the language XML (eXtensible Markup Language) which will help the web evolve from a web of syntactic interactions (viewing documents) to a ‘semantic web’ of transactions. V Rajaraman tells us how this evolution will help electronic data interchange in e-commerce.

Is global warming for real? Deepanjan Majumdar describes the anomalies in data recordings so far. The properties of isometries and their consequences continue as the theme for S Shirali’s Part 2 on symmetry. V U Reddy completes the story of the success of communications engineering in realizing voice-band modems of optimum capacity. Debasis Bandopadhyay tells us about crowns and crypts and their ability to form complexes with ‘reluctant’ metal ions.

A P Gore and S A Paranjape write about numeracy in the social sciences – quantifying amorphous concepts, impressions and unmeasurables. Lest we should get carried away by the abilities of scientific (rational) enquiry, Noam Chomsky (*The Architecture of Language*, OUP, 2000) warns us:

“Science is a very strange activity. It only works for simple problems. Even in the hard sciences, when you move beyond the simplest structures, it becomes very descriptive. By the time you get to big molecules, for example, you are mostly describing things. The idea that deep scientific analysis tells you something about problems of human beings and our lives and our inter-relations with one another and so on is mostly pretence in my opinion – self-serving pretence which is itself a technique of domination and exploitation and should be avoided”.

