

# Editorial

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*S Ramasubramanian, Editor*

An intriguing aspect of any profound scientific theory is how it had been arrived at. Curiosity is bound to be even more in the case of the special theory of relativity, which has caught the imagination of pundits and the proletariat alike. S Banerji recounts how a 16-year-old Einstein asked himself an unconventional question, and how a decade-long pursuit resulted in a rewriting of physics. Fortunately, the romantic image of an unfancied 'outsider' succeeding is vindicated.



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The scientist featured in this issue is David Huffman. His source codes are omnipresent in the IT age. Drawing upon basic notions of probability theory and information theory, Deepak Sridhara gives an overview of Huffman's optimal coding algorithm, and the earlier Shannon–Fano algorithm. As noted in the article-in-a-box, the beauty of Huffman's algorithm lies in its simplicity.

A friend of mine often describes himself as a 'senile prodigy'. Notwithstanding such quips, 'age' can be a touchy issue. In his article B Ramachandra Murty describes the biochemistry of ageing. The role played by free radicals and stress hormones in ageing, and the self-repair capacity of DNA to arrest ageing are highlighted. Hope it helps us age gracefully. The article by Piste and Patil discusses the role of cholesterol on our health.

There is an article on chemical oscillations by Monika Sharma and Praveen Kumar, both students at Panjab University. Also there is a classroom note by Shailesh Shirali on the Sierpiński Problem of number theory; this contains a nice proof given by an Indian high school student. Read on!

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