



## ***Our Readers Write ...***

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I was glad to see the May 2010 issue of *Resonance* featuring Rudolf Peierls. The articles by Professor Bhaduri and Professor Baskaran describe Rudolf Peierls's many Indian connections. The authors may have missed a couple more which I would like to draw their attention to.

Peierls's first connection with India was established in 1934. In the January 6 issue of that year, *Nature* carried an advertisement from the Indian Institute of Science seeking applications from competent scientists to fill in an Assistant Professor's position presumably in theoretical physics. Rudolf Peierls, then in a temporary position in Manchester and on the lookout for a permanent placement outside Germany, responded to the call. To strengthen his case, Peierls sought a recommendation from his teacher Arnold Sommerfeld, as he was aware of the cordial relations between Sommerfeld and Raman. When Sommerfeld wrote to Raman, he not only recommended Peierls, but also Ludwig Hopf, the aerodynamicist, who had just then lost his position in Aachen.

Also in January 1934, Max Born, then in Cambridge, received a letter from Raman who was exploring the possibility of Born taking up a position, should a full Professorship in Theoretical Physics be created for him at the Institute in Bangalore. Born replied to this letter largely in the negative, as he felt it was too late in life for him to effect such a drastic change in his location and to a place of which he had no idea at all. However, in his reply Born mentioned a few of the younger Jewish theorists who had lost their positions due to Hitler's anti-Jewish policies, among them Peierls, Bethe and Nordheim.

Raman prevailed upon Born to make a shorter visit to try out India and Bangalore. Born accepted and arrived in Bangalore in September 1935 and stayed till March 1936. He spent most of these six months teaching and giving seminars. But Raman's efforts to secure him a more permanent position in the Institute ran into insurmountable problems and when Born left in the spring of 1936, he was a bitter man. It appears certain that no formal offers went from Raman to either Bethe or Peierls or anybody else, after this unpleasant end to Born's visit to Bangalore. Much before Born arrived in India, Bethe had left Bristol for a permanent faculty position at the Cornell University, USA.

The other connection between Peierls and India, I would like to mention, happened nearly twenty years later during the Conference on Theoretical Physics in Japan in 1953. Homi Bhabha



and K S Krishnan were the only Indian delegates to this conference. During the conference, Rudolf Peierls approached Krishnan with a problem. Raman and Max Born had been involved for some years in a major controversy on lattice dynamics and Raman was totally dismissive of the cyclic boundary conditions proposed by Born. At Born's instance, Peierls had produced an elegant mathematical proof of the cyclic boundary conditions and had written it up for publication. Both Born and Peierls wanted the work published in the Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Sciences, of which Raman was the Editor. But when Peierls submitted the paper, Raman simply ignored it. Born was insistent that the paper must be published in one of the Indian physics periodicals. Peierls asked Krishnan if the latter could help. Krishnan asked him to send the paper to his address in Delhi. Krishnan had an easy solution at hand. The National Institute of Sciences of India (NISI), of which Krishnan was then the President, had its own Proceedings. Krishnan decided to have the paper published in the Proceedings of NISI. So, when Peierls sent him the paper after returning to England, Krishnan passed it on to D S Kothari of the University of Delhi, who was also the Secretary of NISI. He wrote to Peierls saying that the paper would appear in the Proceedings of NISI in the February or March issue of 1954. Raman's reaction on seeing the paper in print is not known.

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