CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS ORGANIZING SCIENCE

The indirect and unplanned approach of the government towards science and technology until the Second World War had hindered the growth of an all-India central organization and formulation of a long-term policy in the matter. This was more so especially in the period between the exit of Lord Curzon from India and the outbreak of the Second World War, after which conditions changed dramatically. Initially, this happened on account of the immediate exigencies of the war; but later, concern for peace and reconstruction demanded official initiative in a wider and long-term perspective. Thus, by the time the hostilities came to an end, a centralized organizational set-up on an all-India basis had come into being and the authorities had started following a consciously planned policy in the matter.

Efforts before the War

The beginnings of the attempt to introduce central control over scientific matters may be considered to have started with the organization of the Surveys and the Medical Services. The earliest proposal to establish a department of science under the Government of India was made in 1884, keeping in view the need for providing expert advice and central direction for agriculture, botany, forestry and the related areas, but the idea was rejected and almost twenty years elapsed before a similar scheme came into being. The matter assumed political urgency under the viceregalities of Earl of Elgin (1894–1899) and Curzon (1899–1905). In the course of the growing popular unrest during the plague epidemic in India, towards the end of 1898, Elgin recognised the need for scientific advice to the government, and his government asked for the leading scientists in Britain to advise on how to control scientific research in India. This resulted in the formation of the Indian Advisory Committee of the Royal Society; but it remained non-functional. However, the urgency of the matter cropped up in the wake of the famine and plague, and Curzon and his government decided to create their own...
body of experts and thus the Board of Scientific Advice was founded in 1903.¹ But the endeavour could not succeed in the long run. The Government of India created in the meanwhile separate departments, a bureaucratic set-up and some research institutes to deal with agriculture, industry and health. Responding to the recommendations of the Famine Commission of 1901 and the Irrigation Commission of 1903, the government embarked upon an all-India forward policy. The Imperial Agricultural Research Institute was established at Pusa in 1903, followed by agricultural colleges in different parts of the country as at Coimbatore, Poona, Nagpur, Kanpur, Sabour and Layallpur. Besides, a Board of Agriculture was set up in 1904 to advise the government in agricultural matters and bring agricultural experts working in various parts of the country in touch with each other. In order to promote medical research, the institute at Kasauli (est. 1900) was reorganized into the Central Research Institute in 1905; and, in 1911, the Indian Research Fund Association was formed to administer it. However, these measures were isolated from each other and were not adequate for the vast, actual needs of the country.²

The matter once again came for consideration before the Industrial Commission during the First World War but without any consequence of note. The creation of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, in 1929, was, no doubt, a more significant attempt to organize science at the all-India level. But its activities were confined to agriculture and allied sciences only.³ By this time, however, the need for an all India organization under the Government of India was unavoidable as demands for it came from several quarters. But the government resisted the proposal; however, in order to appease the public sentiment, it set up, in 1934, the Industrial Intelligence and Research Bureau—a very small organization with little resources and confined essentially to industrial problems. It was placed under the Indian Stores Department and an Advisory Council was constituted to help it in coordinating research amongst the government departments and formulating its programmes and policies.⁴ Unfortunately, the Council was dominated

² For details, refer to Chap. II.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., and ‘National Research Council for India’, editorial, Science and Culture (hereafter S&C), V, 10, Apr. 1940, pp. 572–574.