

Perfunctory panacea : On the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar

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(Science & Tech.)

Later this month, 33 scientists will be awarded the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP), the current government's revamped approach to independent India's long tradition of annually awarding scientists with promise. The rejig is in doing away with the Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) awards, once awarded to scientists under 45 by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). It comprised a certificate, a cash prize and some additional monetary benefits. The RVP replaces it with a medal and a certificate and, renaming it the Vigyan Yuva-SSB. There are also other RVP awards — the Vigyan Shri, Vigyan Ratna and Vigyan Team awards. The latter will be for scientists over 45 who have made distinguished contributions in science and technology over their entire career as well, as for teams of scientists and technologists with exceptional contributions.

About Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar (RVP)

- ❖ It is a new set of awards introduced by the Government of India in the field of Science, Technology, and Innovation.
- ❖ All nominations received for the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awards are placed before the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar Committee (RVPC), headed by the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to the Government of India.
- ❖ The award ceremony for all categories of awards will be held on 23rd August (National Space Day). All Awards will have a Sanad and a medal.

Objective

- ❖ To recognize the notable and inspiring contributions made by scientists, technologists, and innovators individually or in teams in various fields of science, technology, and technology-led innovation.
- ❖ It is one of the highest recognitions in the field of science, technology, and innovation in India.

Eligibility:

- ❖ Scientists/ technologists/innovators working in government, private sector organizations, or any individual working outside any organization who have made distinguished contributions in terms of path-breaking research, innovation, or discovery in any field of science, technology, or technology- led innovation shall be eligible for the awards.
- ❖ People of Indian origin staying abroad with exceptional contributions benefiting Indian communities or society shall also be eligible for the awards.
- ❖ Scientists will be selected across 13 domains, namely Physics, Chemistry, Biological Sciences, Mathematics & Computer Science, Earth Science, Medicine, Engineering Sciences, Agricultural Science, Environmental Science, Technology & Innovation, Atomic Energy, Space Science and Technology, and Others.
- ❖ The representation from each domain/field, including gender parity will be ensured.

The awards shall be given in following four categories:

- ❖ Vigyan Ratna (VR) award will recognize lifetime achievements and contributions made in any field of science and technology.
- ❖ Vigyan Shri (VS) award will recognize distinguished contributions in any field of science and technology.
- ❖ Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (VY-SSB) award will recognize and encourage young scientists up to the age of 45 years who made an exceptional contribution in any field of science and technology.
- ❖ Vigyan Team (VT) award to be given to a team comprising three or more scientists/researchers/innovators who have made an exceptional contribution working in a team in any field of science and technology.

In theory the total number of awards, under all categories, is capped at 56, though those selected for this year are fewer than the ceiling. The team award has been conferred on the Indian Space Research Organisation's 'Chandrayaan-3 team', which certainly has over three members. These may well be technicalities and, being the first edition of the prizes, could be transitional. The list of awardees spans a wide range of fields from astrophysics to agriculture, and this is not unique to the RVP, the awardees are overwhelmingly from centrally funded and the most elite of India's scientific and research institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, CSIR and atomic energy institutions. The RVP awards were instituted after the Ministry of Home Affairs and heads of science departments concluded in 2022 that there were too many awards being given out by individual scientific departments and that it was necessary to trim them and raise their 'stature' to national awards. While distinguished scientists have always received the Padma awards, just as those in other fields, the original schema for scientist-specific awards was to encourage them to stick to research, whose outcomes are not always immediately tangible and whose impact is not immediately assessed. Much like Olympic medals, Nobel Prizes continue to elude Indian scientists and this has been a touchy topic for many governments. The national awards are not a substitute or catalyst for the Nobels. The government should not assume that scientists only crave honour and recognition. Too many scientists in India labour with minimal funds, substandard equipment and a discouraging milieu, forcing them to compete at the cutting edge of research with their hands tied. Raising the budgetary allocation and making scientific research more rewarding in India will do greater service to science than to-kenism.

Expected Question for Prelims

Que. Consider the following statements with reference to the National Science Award-

1. Awards will be given in four categories.
2. Scientists will be selected from 13 areas.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: What are the recently introduced National Science Awards? Can such awards prove beneficial for better science and technology of India? Comment.

Answer's Approach:

- ❖ Discuss the National Science Award in the first part of the answer.
- ❖ In the second part, discuss the pros and cons of such awards for better science and technology in India
- ❖ Finally give a way forward.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.