

Biased attitude of electronic media towards science

Bharat Ratna is the most prestigious civilian award of India bestowed upon great personalities for serving the nation. We all have to congratulate C. N. R. Rao and Sachin Tendulkar for having received this topmost honour from the Government of India – undoubtedly both are iconic figures deserving this salutation for immeasurably serving the nation and bringing it at the forefront of their respective fields.

Unfortunately after the announcement of the award, there are several debates on the suitability of the announced awardee(s) for this accolade. There is no point in raising voices against their suitability through comparison with other great personalities, who, somehow, did not get the award. On the other hand, the eminent personalities who have received this award should be appreciated. The media has a major role to play in publicising issues and bringing them to the common

man. Being scientists, our great concern is that the media had unequal coverage on Rao and Tendulkar. Both of them were bestowed with the same award for contributions in their respective fields (science and sports), but not a single media channel elaborated on the immeasurable contributions of Rao in science, which has already fetched him all major awards of the country and abroad.

Tendulkar's contribution to cricket is undoubtedly outstanding, but at the same time the contribution of a scientist of world repute cannot be overshadowed and ignored by the media. Science is the backbone of any development, should it be the media or sports or any walk of life.

This negligent approach of media towards science and technology, which play the pivotal role for socio-economic development of the nation, is not new and case-specific, but is often experienced by scientists. As a consequence,

young students are not much inclined and stimulated to opt for science as a career option. It is the responsibility of the media to cover the awards and accolades being bestowed on the researchers in science and technology on a regular basis, so as to motivate the younger generation, create healthy competition and improve the quality of research in science.

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Restructuring the pattern of refresher courses for science teachers organized by UGC Academic Staff Colleges

It is mandatory for all teachers to attend three refresher courses and one orientation course organized by various UGC Academic Staff Colleges across the country. This UGC rule aims to improve the quality of teaching and upgrade the knowledge base of the teacher participants. However, it fails to achieve this due to poor structuring of the syllabus content. Attending such courses that cover elementary topics is considered to be a waste of time by the teachers themselves and is done to only fulfil the requirements set by UGC, to be eligible for promotion and salary hike. It is a rueful situation that many teachers are not competent enough to understand even the basic tenets in science disciplines related to their own. Further, in an age where boundaries between subjects are being broken to accommodate a multidisciplinary approach, UGC seems to be still sticking to the age-old method of compartmentalization of science. Teachers are restricted from attending courses other than the ones they are specialized in.

Most refresher courses lack prior planning and are conducted as the money is already earmarked in the UGC's budget. Often, the course content is not based on the prescribed syllabus, but on the availability of the resource persons. Ironically, the participating teachers too prefer to have elementary and basic topics rather than the more recent and advanced ones, as one need not spend much effort on completing the course.

UGC needs to recognize the flaws in its system and take measures to modify them. The current rules specify a teacher to attend 3+1 refresher courses and orientation programme which are usually held for a total duration of 21 days. It is not possible for participants to catch-up with the rapid advancements in their respective disciplines in such a short time. Instead, UGC must conduct shorter and more frequent courses for a duration of about 15 days on varied topics, including the recent developments with the flexibility of modifying them every year. It should also be kept in mind to include practical components in the curriculum.

It should be made mandatory for teachers to choose courses outside their area of specialization. This would help in developing a more multi-disciplinary approach. In many cases, the staff colleges follow a lenient system in assigning grades. Introducing on-line tests whose evaluation is outsourced can help in setting up a more stringent system of evaluation.

Being a teacher in the current age is a great challenge. With the advance in technology, students are able to receive and gather information faster than their teachers. UGC should, therefore, take steps to revamp the structure of the refresher courses in order to ensure well-equipped and quality teachers for the future.

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