

## Gift authorship belittles faith on integrity of publications and India's future

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Analysing the maddening ignominious gold rush for accepting gift authorships in India, it is imperative to proclaim the truth that core competencies of India rest on the knowledge produced by sciences as well as technology assessment proved by documented bibliography. Text mining of published literature that give rise to citations, acts as a valid indicator of R&D activity in any subject area.

Intellectual linkages among the national, international and cross-continental authors who produce the materials do matter, as research publications form the primary foundation for futuristic technologies and act as a driving force for sustainable development of a nation's economy in manifold ways. Normally, a cross-country or intra-national institute research consortium facilitates exploring the research and policy interface for better realization of the fruits of results into productive applications in society. Gift authorship, which is rampant in the scholarly circles of intellectual excellence, is a grave concern in Indian science and society. It diminishes the confidence level of the society on the integrity of scholars, devaluates legitimate sciences and invalidates communal support for science testament-based policies.

Some have argued gift giving as an organizing principle in science<sup>1</sup>. Honorary authorship practices confer pseudo-merit and/or admiration, and attenuates the genuine credit of the actual craftsman, thereby making real attribution of credit a fruitless task<sup>2</sup>. The signing of scientific papers by their authors 'confers credit and denotes responsibility'<sup>3</sup>.

A scientist acclaimed for a credit ought to take epistemological/legal onus for the actuality of his/her postulations published and it is high-time to address these issues of impropriety<sup>4</sup>. Documented evidence-based policing and management has greater stimulus and strong momentum today. Policy regulators count only on attested testimonies to refrain from instinctive ideologies, mere theories and prevailing wisdom<sup>5</sup>. Viability of scientific research rests with science community backing and any societal transformation through confidently

accepted scientific process draws commendation<sup>6</sup>. The integral stature and foothold of the scientific enterprise would be in jeopardy, since the country and its populace, do always trust published scientific endorsements, and depend on the scientists and adopting intellectuals for improved social values<sup>6</sup>.

Defence, debate and admittance of faults and errors in published technological contents reaching the public domain are warranted and expected by the funding agencies, broad spectrum of the reader pool and the society as a whole<sup>7</sup>, implying an inter-laced mosaic of science and politics. In principle and in good faith, an author should have participated either through conceptualization of the study or leading through composition of article, review, edit revision and approval, as has been detailed in the Vancouver guidelines. Scientific authorship per se as guests, courtesy and contributions, has interesting ethical dimensions and there is not one universally recognized authorship standard for all of the tribe of science<sup>8</sup>. Scientific authorships are not grouped or methodized like intellectual property laws, but modulate with disciplines and think-tanks. It is not entailing legal rights but the honour of rewards and returns and cannot be conceptually grouped under legal percepts<sup>4</sup>. Counting papers and citations has become an inescapable activity in the field of science<sup>9</sup>.

Plurality of evaluation does exist within the higher cordon of scientific jury, never filtering scholars by default with maximum paper counts, but focusing on a totality of specialized knowledge for evolution of technocracy of scientists<sup>10</sup>. Biologist Peter Lawrence<sup>11,12</sup> has argued powerfully against the tyranny of growth in inappropriate honorary authorship that hides true contributions and sternly yearns for obviating it through a debate between peers that permits a true and live computation of scientific merit.

Scholarly integrity of researchers is key to academic foundation. But the compounding breed of befouling, gift authorship recipients who are precarious

interlopers into the erudition resource pool of the faithful investigators, tarnish the morals, ideals, conduct and code of scientific ethics within the social order with a duplicitous merit. Like a terror leopard, they never change their spots (blotched mind), but just change their plant cover (behind a football team of clustered authors), the tall grass (a senior scientist) or a treetop (an awardee) to hide. The crusade of spammers faking false ingenuity is a regrettable blight akin to cancer metastasizing into the new millennial ocean of scholarly publishing. Let us discourage this disease through mass media – satirical skits on television; putting bill-boards appealing to budding researchers to be true to science, inscribing re-edited 'Keystones of Thought' maxim of Austin O'Malley (Science is Truth/Do not clip its Wings) on pens, water bottles, carry bags, even trains and buses; reworking of the scholastic code of publications; moral instruction classes and/or counselling; school assembly talk on most inspired shining scientists and their truthful toil; college dramas symbolizing the dramatic downturn of events through gift authors and their falsified talents in public life that jeopardize responsible transformation of our country, now or decades later. With sprouting publications of such dubious provenance and tweetable citations, this nonconformist gift author will not pass the confirmative test some day, unable to fake scientific involvement and demonstrate real merit, unable to show intellectual calibre in delivering upfront meritorious solutions of field worthiness. The repercussions of such false credits and failed rational dignity in standing the test of time bear grave social implications. Let us evangelize the nation and labour hard to halt entry of gift authors from besmirching Indian science societies, academies and think-tanks, but cultivating true scientific spirit and vehemently wiping out the counterfeit experts for saving our posterity.

Publication records do weigh heavily in hiring, funding, and promotion decisions<sup>13</sup>. Offering honour-less honours, blindly stigmatize an incongruous liability

elsewhere, literally unfolding newer unqualified forts in society defending a scientific paper<sup>6</sup>. India of today is transforming at a fast pace into a knowledge economy through information and communication technologies. Fruits of Indian academic research in every field are being increasingly absorbed by business investors today than ever before, through public-private partnerships. Building result-oriented institutional capacity is pressingly crucial for India. The Government cannot afford to drain its exchequer by recruiting ill and fake scientists and virtually negating the capacity of national brain-power in promulgating constructive reforms. Young professionals (scientists, technologists and economists) are continually being inducted in the NITI Aayog based on proven records of published works. India expects youthful brains to demonstrate really proven academic, professional and leadership talents, but not to brazenly embrace a subversive realm of shameful

honorary authors, who in cold blood, become the answerable promises of tomorrow's India.

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