CURRENT SCIENCE

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A tasteless chemical mix

Chemistry may be alive and well, but not in Current Science. In an exciting subject that has many overlap regions with biology, medicine, physics and engineering, Current Science has managed to churn out a large number of uninteresting, routine papers. To become a journal of some value, Current Science should stop yielding indiscriminately to the demand of scientists to publish, give its reviewing system more sinew, and take serious account of topics of current interest.

By far the biggest problem for editorial committees of science journals concerns the quality they wish to uphold to reach out to a wide audience of research scientists. *Current Science* has recently had a 'face lift', and publishes items such as reports on current trends in different branches of science, news, provocative opinions and debatable policy issues. While it continues to publish original research papers, the question remains one of standard and credibility.

Chemistry has many overlap regions with other disciplines such as biology, medicine, physics and engineering sciences, and is therefore a major area from which many publications arise. There has been an increasing demand among chemists to publish their research findings and many publishers have obligingly started new journals in specialist topics. Even well-recognized chemical societies have multiplied their journals in chemistry to cater to the increasing urge of chemists to publish. If *Current Science* must survive this fierce competition, it should look for credibility and high standards. It should assure scientists about the standards it wants to uphold, even, perhaps, at the cost of forgoing a few issues for the lack of good papers. It is a hard decision for the editorial committee. It is much easier to proclaim that only papers that present results that are novel, significant and of broad interest will be published but it is difficult to find authors and manuscripts.

Most of the papers in chemistry that have appeared in *Current Science* can be categorized into the following areas: (i) Analytical chemistry. A large number of papers have appeared that deal with one or other aspect of the following: (a) new organic reagents for the separation and estimation of metal ions, (b) development of a rapid and specific method of analysis of a given metal ion, and (c) colorimetric and other spectral methods of analysis. These papers doubtless carry significant results but then is *Current Science* the medium for them? (ii) Coordination chemistry. The papers describe the synthesis of coordination compounds of metal ions with new ligand systems, with limited spectral data. Often, the structures described are ill-characterized and incomplete. A few of the papers are complete but these should really be published in specific-area journals rather than in *Current Science*. (iii) Organic chemistry. A good number of papers deal with the synthesis of new organic compounds with therapeutic value. The therapeutic value is most often not rigorously tested nor is the structural integrity of the compounds well established. Clearly, these papers are of no significance to the general readership of *Current Science*. (iv) Physical chemistry. Most of the papers that have appeared concern themselves with the kinetics of oxidation or reduction of organic substrates using metal complexes or well-known oxido-reductants. Apart from the description of a particular method of analysis, the papers are often devoid of any new mechanisms or novel interpretations. Occasionally, there have been papers on spectroscopy and quantum calculations. These papers are again limited in scope and do not warrant publication in *Current Science*.

Despite the fact that there are a large number of chemists in the country who have been publishing good papers, the question remains as to why *Current Science* is not considered as a medium for publication by these chemists. It is difficult to find an answer but a few reasons can be advanced. Over the years, *Current Science* has yielded rather indiscriminately to the demand of scientists to publish. It has lost touch with the advancing frontiers in science and has remained static. The refereeing system has lagged behind, and this is clearly reflected in the fall in standard of papers. It is possible to list many more but what is the solution? If *Current Science* must be a premier journal, it should take serious account of topics of current interest. It should attract authors with the promise that it will maintain good standards of publication. The policy should be to publish a small number of good papers and not publish so many not-so-good papers for the sake of maintaining volume. *Current Science* should not be allowed to become the hope of the 'for every paper there is a journal' class.

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