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Decline in interest for S&T training

This is with reference to the article 'A declining trend in the interest of fresh graduates for doctoral and post-doctoral training in different areas of science and technology' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1998, 74, 20–24). It has been aptly pointed out by the authors that the decrease in the interest of pursuing research is due to scarcity of job opportunities and a sudden increase in employment opportunities in other sectors of society. The authors have taken the ratio of the number of applicants for JRFs/SRFs/RAs/SRAs to the M Sc graduates' output. It would have been more appropriate if the ratio of the number of Ph Ds awarded or the number of Ph D registrations to the graduate output was considered. This ratio is important because for pursuing Ph D in our country, qualification in UGC-CSIR or GATE is not a must since some Universities and Institutes admit candidates with a mere M Sc. One more point to be considered here is that most of the Universities consider State Level Eligibility Test (SLET) conducted by the respective State College Service Commissions as an eligibility for admission to Ph D without even a formal entrance test. So the ratio of Ph Ds awarded/registered to graduate output may provide a more realistic assessment of research interest among the graduates.

There are a number of other factors which merit attention in analysing the

declining trend in the field of research among the fresh graduates:

1. Increasing budgetary constraints prevent Universities and research Institutions from attracting students since they cannot afford to offer fellowships to the deserving.

2. The decision by the UGC not to consider GATE-qualified candidates for Ph D fellowship is a severe blow to potential Ph D aspirants and new entrants to research.

3. The CSIR-UGC exam which is essential to obtain a fellowship is rated as one of the toughest exams. Most Indian Universities do not have a curriculum at graduate and post-graduate level on par with the UGC-CSIR exam syllabus. Candidates do not have a clear cut idea of the requirements so that they can prepare well accordingly. Model papers and previous exam papers are not available, which again is a hindrance to the applicant.

4. The delay in implementing of a novel system like the Indian Scientific Service (ISS) on the same lines as Indian Administrative Service, wherein any student admitted for a Ph D after rigorous testing and screening is guaranteed a government service like Scientist/Research Officer. Every year the number of Ph D admissions shall be made keeping in view the number of vacancies that may arise in the next two years. Until such a guarantee is not

given, research interest will continue to erode.

5. Last but not the least, is the amount of fellowship that is being paid to the JRFs/SRFs/RAs/SRAs. At present it is Rs 2500 and Rs 2800 (excluding house rent) for JRF and SRF, respectively. A B Sc graduate working as a technician in a private diagnostic laboratory is paid the same salary or even more. Further, the technician has increasing opportunities of employment along with his experience. But the same is not the case with a Ph D student. Recently the Government of India has enhanced the pay for all its employees in all sectors and has not even uttered a word about the fellowships enhancement to JRFs/SRFs/RAs/SRAs, who form the foundation and manpower of Indian scientific research; and the same Government expects good results in Science and Technology. It is today's JRFs/SRFs/RAs/SRAs who will be tomorrow's scientists and it is the responsibility of the Government to woo the young research aspirants into the scientific field. It is entirely understandable that persons in every walk of life expect proper pay.

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