

Scientific communication: A viewpoint

'Motivate students for science communication' by Dilip Salwi (*Curr. Sci.*, 2000, **79**, 263) is appropriately the need of the hour. Salwi has rightly said that scientists are poor in communication skills. The prevailing educational system emphasizes only on the contents of a scientific subject, but ignores its language. Moderate to serious study of language and literature is essential to be a good communicator. Scientists from developed nations dominate the international science journals because they are good readers of literature too. It is said that literature is a mirror of the society. Unfortunately, Indians are poor readers. Salwi says 82% of Indian science communication never surfaces and 65% of the people are interested in science-based news and articles in the media. He further emphasized upon the

establishment of Science Media Centres. But for whom? The Union Government is also responsible for the present state of science. After 53 years of independence, the nation has felt a necessity for a National Science Policy. When Murli Manohar Joshi, Union Minister for Human Resource Development, addressed the joint session of Parliament on the eve of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Indian Independence for more than an hour on the Indian science scenario, less than twenty members listened to his well-articulated speech. This explains the apathy of Indian leaders towards science in general. It is really a tragic situation and deserves utmost attention. Salwi has rightly emphasized upon the role of regional languages and dialects in science communication. But cultivation of the

reading habit should be given top priority. Mere production of voluminous literature is not enough; it should arouse the interest of the reader on the subject and be conveyed in a lucid manner. Bharat Muni defines communication in his masterpiece, *Natya Shastra*, as 'Sadharikaran'. It implies, not merely the receipt of information, but its understanding also. Communication continues till the receiver is engrossed with the content. It is the duty of the source to deliver the message in such a manner. Makers of the National Science Policy should take note of these aspects.

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Chaos in higher education

One may appreciate the concern of A. S. Rao (*Curr. Sci.*, 2000, **78**, 119) over the overlapping roles of colleges, universities and research institutes in imparting higher education in our country. He rightly invites a discussion on their individual institutional role in society, to serve the needs of the country in a fruitful way. Attention may also be drawn to the next correspondence in the same issue of *Current Science* by Min Raj Dhakal (pp. 119–120) in which the author laments the poor returns of academic conferences, but he does not wish to kill them as K. N. Ganeshaiah (*Curr. Sci.*, 1999, **77**, 739–741) recommended. Dhakal desires improvements in these conferences.

Most of the colleges and universities (I emphasize universities too) lack infrastructure, funds, academic standards, training, discipline, character-building and what-not, but they continue to function since the end result – the evaluation and the award of degrees – is being achieved sooner or later, irrespective of whether the teaching and training have been imparted to the students or not. However, one sentence in Dhakal's

write up provides the appropriate answer to the problem raised in both the correspondences. It is, 'Instead, even for "big" scientists, politicians often function as a sacred cow hanging on whose tail they can cross the river Baitarani'. So long as 'big' scientists, educationists, and intellectuals look to the politicians for solving institutional and personal problems or depend on them to run the institutions, the future of higher education in the country is none too bright.

Let me first say that what Rao desires is not likely to happen. Secondly, even if scientists or educationists define the separate roles of colleges, universities and research institutes, the structure will break down sooner or later for various reasons. I put a counter question to Rao. What is the aim and object today for starting a new college or university? Is it to impart knowledge to the youth? Is it to infuse excellence in the youth? Is backwardness or lack of development of the area a requirement for opening an institute? It is purely political compulsions that dictate setting up such an institution. How can one expect any

administrative exercise based on academics, free from political compulsions? PG classes in a college, a particular course in a university or research in a college, etc. all become a status symbol for the institution and for the faculty. Any attempt to deprive facilities once established, is likely to invite stiff resistance and opposition from within.

The growing number of engineering and management colleges in the country has resulted in education becoming a commodity which can be purchased.

So the first step to get rid of the chaos in higher education is to awaken the 'big' scientists and educationists from their slumber, to stress upon the government that higher education is not meant for the masses, democratic principles cannot be applied to excellence and that hospitals cannot be run and the dams cannot be constructed by second rate and third rate graduates.

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