

Where have we gone wrong?

Surely, there is misunderstanding somewhere. The letters of Ambasht¹, Tripathi² and Gupta³ indicate, not the hollowness of our science education system, but expose vulnerability of manpower to extraneous considerations. It is common knowledge that majority of our scientists are not good teachers and excellent teachers are not willing to keep their learning track open. We refuse to accept that undergraduate science education is different from postgraduate studies. Our high-school teachers also do not inculcate scientific spirit to any appreciable extent.

One cannot expect every college teacher to be a missionary. At the same time, denying research/consultancy is also a sin. It is an open secret, as to who decides the extent of involvement of teachers in research and teaching. I know of cases where professors who run projects worth several crores do not spend even a single day in a week in their laboratory. At the same time, I also know of professors who spend a lot of time with their research students. We are a land of extremes, either we have simple teachers or flamboyant professors.

Be it population or science, quantity is not quality. When tens of thousands of students are churned out with postgraduate degrees every year – from national institutes of eminence to low-grade rural colleges, you cannot grade their knowledge on the basis of degrees. On several counts, we cannot refuse postgraduate education

to our citizens. The gender bias also is gone, we see equal number of girls in the so-called hard-core science subjects. We cannot find fault with the contents of the curriculum as they are upgraded periodically by the UGC and universities. Time has come to evaluate our college teachers publicly, when they talk about their 'market value'. It is rather a pity that Tripathi (page 332) has misused the well-intended speech of Montek Singh Ahluwalia. I think, it should be made compulsory that every college teacher goes through *The Idea of a University* by Cardinal Newman. University/college is not a market place. The best evaluation of teachers can be done by the student community. Three continuous years of honest assessment by students, with a proper questionnaire and a statistical analysis can be the best tool to weed out the dull academics.

The craze for headship in the university departments is not new. As long as the administrative powers are invested in one man in a teaching department (either to the seniormost person or by rotation), and that person is held responsible for the well-being or otherwise of the department, there will be a rat race. If a person of eminence holds the headship, he drags the whole department to his line of thinking, for good or bad. I do not subscribe to the view that the intellectual calibre of a teacher will be better understood, if he is the head of a department.

When we look at the salary component of university teachers, it is not bad at all. It is wrong to compare with MNCs, where the hire and fire policy works. Tertiary education is not an industry and 'education' should not be a revenue earner. We can see this point through the eyes of Rajaji who said, 'government is governance and not for profit'. Universities also should not assume a stepmotherly attitude towards teachers who do not earn from projects. All that is expected by a common man is good quality formal education from the university. If teachers think in diagonal ways about headship, market value and personal aggrandizement, the very purpose of achieving independence will be lost. If our college teachers understand the editorial in the same issue of *Current Science*⁴, they will know their purpose in life.

1. Ambasht, P. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **88**, 331.
2. Tripathi, Y. B., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **88**, 332.
3. Gupta, Y. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **88**, 333.
4. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **88**, 329–330.

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Reinventing Indian universities

The editorial¹ quoting what C. V. Raman said at Mysore and Banares, brings out clearly that things have not changed much. He apparently made the comments looking at the situation that existed in the universities at that time and that too at the two famous universities of his time, namely Mysore and Banares.

One should not worry too much about what the apex court has said regarding the universities in Chhattisgarh. In countries abroad, small private colleges (called universities) produce some of the best workforce in liberal arts and business management. Natural evolution will take care and ensure that the best will only sur-

vive in this competitive world, provided the government keeps out of it.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **88**, 529–530.

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