

## Nose-diving scientific temper: A clarion call for science enthusiasts

The coveted place that science and the people associated with it have enjoyed and still continue to enjoy in our society, is now somewhat dwindling. The awe and respect that scientists, science students and science teachers earlier used to command, is fast becoming a thing of the past. The fast-depleting interest in studying science (especially pure sciences), among the youth, is disappointing and in sharp contrast with the pro-science euphoria being created by the government and different organizations associated with science. The apathy of the public at large towards science is due mainly to the failure of government organizations like CSIR, universities, and officials entrusted with the job of popularizing science. The scientific community is becoming increasingly indifferent and lacklustre in its approach and attitude. It does not take pride in being associated with science. The undue harassment that most Ph D scholars are subjected to by their supervisors, is also a major cause of lack of interest towards science among the students. Our constitution imposes the national duty on every citizen of the country to inculcate and develop a scientific temper. In this day and age, the science stream no longer remains a special or a sought after career option among the youth. Scientists and science teachers are required to overhaul their ways of functioning, to reverse this trend. Few scientists and science teachers still remain, whom the students and researchers would like to idolize and emulate. Non-science teachers on the other hand, are comparatively much better placed. It is a general perception in the universities, that science teachers and professors lack human values like compassion and consideration towards their students, while the teachers of Law and Arts (humanities) etc. still retain these values, making them more popular among their pupils. The non-science teachers are still able to develop an intimate rapport with their

taught, and are more sensitive to their needs, perhaps because they are more down-to-earth and close to real-life situations.

The penchant among scientists to match their status, perks and powers with those of the bureaucratic top brass of the country creates an explicit insufficiency in their psychology, behaviour and performance. Most of the scientists thus suffer from a severe inferiority complex, and utterly lack the innovative instinct. This strong desire to exercise bureaucratic power has given rise to power savvy and power wielding 'science bureaucrats' doing ordinary, routine chores, rather than legitimate scientific work. Scientists no longer take pleasure in their job. Increasingly, most scientists at the national laboratories merely consider themselves as just any other government employee and fail to engage themselves in scientific activities.

On the other hand, the situation is not as grim or deplorable in the universities. Science teachers and professors in the universities engage in research (in the face of poor facilities), more out of interest rather than as a mandatory job requirement. Thus it appears that the over-emphasis and dependence upon national laboratories especially at the cost of our universities, has not paid dividends and has proved counter-productive. It is painful to note how corruption and unaccountability have penetrated our society, and made us insensitive towards each other and our most essential duties. This general downfall has affected the scientific establishment of our country. It is ironical to observe how the people who are entrusted with the noble job of cultivating science have actually harmed the cause of science. The criterion of granting promotions to scientists must also be reformed, so that the interests of a genuine worker who is engaged in a novel pursuit, are adequately protected. The current promotion policy requiring a minimum number of mandatory publications has resulted in a rat race among sci-

entists to publish just about anything at any cost in order to get promoted. This quest for earning short-term 'quick bucks' is harmful to the national interest and those who genuinely love science. There must be an impartial and high-powered body in place, which must act as an efficient arbitrator, in cases of scientific disputes, and check such rampant malpractices, to make the whole science management clean and transparent and an attractive career option for the younger generation.

The contribution of the national research laboratories in national development is acknowledged. However, the scenario would have been much better, had the universities also been made equally well equipped and technologically upgraded, for advanced basic and applied research, as is the case with the agricultural universities. This step would help in two major ways. First, installation of sophisticated instruments and facilities for advanced research in the universities would benefit a larger number of youth and serve the cause of popularizing science much better. Secondly, making the universities more efficient will also foster a healthy competition among the universities and national laboratories, which will ultimately help raise the overall level of scientific research. We must rejuvenate our young talent and make pure sciences an attractive option. Then only can the scientific temper be cherished, and a peoples' movement in this direction would certainly deliver the goods.

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