

Indian science crisis of performance vs fakeness

This is in response to the contribution by Akhila¹. At the outset, science in India and especially in independent India was promoted by government funding. The exceptions (privately funded) though they mattered most, were too few to be counted. While government funding made it possible to expand, it also brought with it certain elements which were counter to scientific institutions and the very pursuit of science. Since the beginning was made on government (bureaucratic) lines with time it acquired frightening proportions. With the advent of RTI and Whistle Blower Protection Act it has now become possible to take a fresh look at the whole system. Science establishments are under so much authoritarian regulations, that in spite of the awareness of all the working scientists about the patent drama enacted by one of the most clever science managers in the history of Indian science, it remained unquestioned for so many years until Jayraman² who is one of the most concerned observers of Indian science brought it into the open though a little too late. This drama was started in the early nineties and finally got exposed only in July 2006, more than a decade after it got going. This exposure

provided the much-needed space for scientists to take it up and was indeed followed. It may be mentioned that out of the whole community of scientists very few like Akhila and Lavania showed exemplary courage and conviction to follow it up in *Nature*³ and *Current Science*⁴. In fact, they proved that scientists are not dumb souls and they can also show genuine concern like other responsible citizens or persons occupying positions of influence. It may also be mentioned that none of our wise old men (in different committees and fora, I should be pardoned for gender bias for obvious reasons) intervened as they have learnt to stay away from uncomfortable questions. I therefore wish to thank them for their conviction, clarity of thought and genuine concern for science and the nation at large. I think that *Current Science* has taken up challenges from time to time and has provided a platform for such articles and thereby catalysing a process, which may eventually lead to questioning the ills prevailing in Indian science and thus preparing a ground for search for solutions which may eventually pave the way for better science in India. Many scientists can make positive

contributions through RTI and Whistle Blower Protection Act by exposing the ills prevailing in Indian science and contribute for its betterment in their own interest and in the interest of the nation. Currently, we are facing a dual problem: underperformance and fakeness. While underperformance is a real problem of Indian science and tackling it would require long-term planning; fakeness, on the other hand, is the byproduct of underperformance and can be tackled very effectively by adopting transparency. The patent drama is a case in point where a clever one has cashed in on the underperformance by faking.

1. Akhila, A., *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 709.
2. Jayaraman, K. S., *Nature*, 2006, **442**, 120.
3. Lavania, U. C., *Nature*, 2006, **442**, 744.
4. Akhila, A., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 143.

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Rediscovery of *Pandanus unguifer* Hook. f. (Pandanaceae): A RET species from its type-locality after 75 years

Pandanus unguifer Hook. f. – a dwarf endemic species was described by J. D. Hooker in *Flora of British India* in 1878 from Mungpo locality below Surail (British Sikkim region) which now is under Darjeeling District, West Bengal, India. However, Hooker could not come across the male inflorescence of the plant. During the field survey in eastern Himalayan region, the first author came across a small population consisting of only 10–15 plants growing in the bed of a streamlet in the *Cinchona* plantation at Mungpo locality. A perusal of the literature revealed that the type specimen collected by Hooker was also from the same local-

ity but, of course, there were no *Cinchona* plantations at that time. A scrutiny of the herbarium specimens housed in different important herbaria, like CAL, LBG, BSHC, ASSAM, K and *Index Seminum* of different botanical gardens of India revealed that the species was never recorded from any other locality. A few saplings were brought and grown at the Indian Botanic Garden, Howrah, all of which survived and produced flowers. This is the only *Pandanus* species that produces flowers in potted condition and hence, is of ornamental value. The flowers (flowering during August) are mildly fragrant and creamy white on branched

inflorescence. The spathes encircling the inflorescence are also cream coloured. The inflorescence remains fresh up to five days. The plants are locally called as 'Sano-Tarika' (*Sano* – dwarf; *Tarika* – *Pandanus*). The female plants of this species are quite common but yet to be introduced away from their type locality.

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