

## Ranking of research performance of Indian universities can be manipulated

Prathap and Gupta<sup>1</sup> ranked 25 Indian universities on the basis of research performance. Prathap<sup>2</sup> also did the same NISCAIR ranking for the top 20 universities in India. The recent article evaluated research work from 1999 to 2008 whereas the earlier article reviewed publication track record of various universities between 2004 and 2008. Surprisingly, the results of these two studies not only turned the ranking topsy turvy but some of the universities which are listed in September 2009 article are absent in the June 2009 article. Sanjay Gandhi PGIMS, University of Mumbai, Madurai Kamaraj University, Cochin University of S&T, Osmania University (separate from University of Hyderabad according to the list provided), Andhra University and CCS Haryana Agricultural University are all absent in the earlier ranking, and Mangalore University which was listed at 20th rank in June 2009 is absent in September 2009. While methods of ranking may be correct, this discrepancy brings out a very interesting observation, i.e. by selecting the year under study you can change the ranking based on research performance of the university.

Moreover this brings up the next question, i.e. why have the author selected 1999–2008 for one article? Another anomaly is the inclusion of CMC Vellore and Sanjay Gandhi PGIMS when they are not universities at all! In fact, CMC Vellore's publications should have been evaluated under University of Madras as CMC Vellore is an institution under this university.

Similarly, if Sanjay Gandhi PGIMS is evaluated then why not AIIMS, New Delhi; PGIMER Chandigarh; ICMR Institutes; CSIR Institutes; Indian Institute of Science, etc. Each of these institutes is likely to have published more than 1200 papers in the 10-year period under study. However, if we evaluate the long-term performance of the university year by year we may get the true picture of its research performance.

Finally, a few words about ranking the university on the basis of publications. While ranking the university based on its publications is a necessity<sup>3</sup>, there is no single best way of ranking an institute due to the complex attributes of a university. Many publications in Indian journals have changed the way we practise medicine in this country or there have

been seminal observations made in Indian journals which are not quoted by high impact international journals. One of the major reasons for this anomaly is that we Indian scientists often do not quote from our own national journals, refrain from submitting our best articles in our own national journals but we expect that our journals will become high impact journals when we wake up from this Rip-Van Winkle slumber of neglect and superciliousness. The two papers<sup>1,2</sup> clearly show that research performance rank of a university can be clearly manipulated by the assessment parameters and cut-off dates.

1. Prathap, G. and Gupta, B. M., *Curr. Sci.*, 2009, **97**, 751–752.
2. Prathap, G., *Curr. Sci.*, 2009, **96**, 1560–1561.
3. Raj Gopal, V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2009, **97**, 744.

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1. Menezes, R. G., Sharma, P. S., Manipady, S. and Kanchan, T., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **91**, 736.
  2. Menezes, R. G., Kanchan, T., Arun, M. and Manipady, S., *Natl. Med. J. India*, 2006, **19**, 111–112.

3. Kanchan, T., Menezes, R. G. and Hunnargi, S. A., *Am. J. Forensic Med. Pathol.*, 2009, **30**, 217.
  4. Menezes, R. G., Kanchan, T., Bodhe, A. V., Rao, P. P. J., Lobo, S. W., Shetty, M. and Pillay, V. V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 699.
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## On shoulders of Giants!

All of Ann Körner's messages to young scientists are appropriate<sup>1</sup>. However, readers of *Current Science* would find it of interest to know that that the modest statement 'If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of Giants' may not really belong in this essay.

John Gribbin<sup>2</sup> writes about an entirely different – and quite plausible – explanation for this statement. As is well known, Newton, one of the greatest scientists of all time, was a boor and egotistical in his private life. Thus, such a statement of humility would be unexpected from him. John Faulkner of the Lick Observatory, California has suggested that this famous statement be interpreted in the light of history – and in its complete form, with the preceding statements, rather than on its own. The entire paragraph which Newton wrote, in a letter to Robert Hooke was 'What Des-Cartes did was a good step. You have added much in several ways, and especially in taking ye colours of think plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants'.

The background to this letter is the feud that existed between Newton and Hooke: Newton had failed to acknow-

ledge, in a paper on optics in 1671, Hooke's contributions to the subject. When Hooke objected to this, Newton took offence at the very suggestion that Hooke, who he did not hold in high regard, could claim priority to a scientific idea. Thus, in his letter, he suggested that even Hooke himself could not claim priority to the concept as it was Descartes who had done the work much earlier and all that Hooke was doing was not original but merely adding something extra to someone else's discovery. The final kick, though, is the word 'Giant', with a capital G. Faulkner suggests that the use of the capital G in his letter is intentional: Hooke was small in stature and a hunchback as well. By using the word Giant (and not giant!), Newton was delivering a message that not only was Hooke physically Lilliputian, but intellectually so as well. This explanation would perfectly fit into the known image of Newton as an acerbic individual.

Newton continued holding a grudge against Hooke all his life and this extended beyond Hooke's death. How nasty a piece of work was Newton? Suffice it to say that, after Hooke's death in 1703, Newton joined the Royal Society, London, an institution that he was not a part

of earlier, because the society had largely been set up by Hooke. During Newton's presidency of the Royal Society, in 1710, the quarters of the Society was shifted from Gresham College to Crane Court. Newton took personal interest to see that all the portraits of the past fellows be safely carried from the earlier office to the new one. Only one portrait was mysteriously lost during the transfer – that of Robert Hooke! No authentic portrait of Hooke exists today.

Thus, one of the most famous aphorisms in science – and the tagline of the google scholar – is probably a misattribution!

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