

An ambience to perform well

Plagiarism and misconduct (P&M) has become a topical subject in India. One can analyse this and suggest remedial measures¹⁻³, or just ignore it as there are sufficient number of persons who do not indulge in P&M, or look at it as a serious problem that could assume dangerous proportions if ignored.

P&M is possible at all levels and by all categories of academicians. One of the root causes of this problem is that the gargantuan expansion in education has not been met with the required increase in grants and expert faculty. Till this shortage is overcome, apex bodies could bring about certain reforms to minimize P&M.

One such reform could be to abolish mandatory project work at the under-

graduate, postgraduate and MPhil levels, considering the enormous number of students. This slot could be substituted with an alternative programme – for example, many students are interested in clearing NET/SLET exams (for joining national institutes for a Ph D), GRE (both general and subject), TOEFL/IELTS (English language exams) or preparing for different jobs.

Another change could be to decide on the number of Ph D students that a faculty member can guide based on the grants and facilities available with him/his institute. Any kind of excessive pressure on students and faculty to perform may create a stressful situation, which can be contagious and compromise value judgements.

Many Indian students go abroad and perform commendably, clearly indicating their potential capabilities. What we need to do is to create an ambience for them to perform well in our country.

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1. Satija, M. P., *Univ. News*, 2011, **49**, 4–8.
 2. Desai, P. N., *The New Indian Express*, Chennai, 15 October 2011, p. 8.
 3. Rajput, J. S., *The New Indian Express*, Chennai, 16 October 2011, p. 9.
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Unwanted ground vegetation?

Is ground vegetation unwanted in a forest area? Certainly not. It forms one of the main sources of food for the animals living there, and also a food source for the inhabitants of the forest villages. It is the habitat of a large number of insects and small animals. It also preserves soil from erosion and helps in soil formation.

But indiscriminate weeding, burning and destruction of ground vegetation have become common in the forests of the sub-Himalayan West Bengal. This area is the homeland of a good number of endemic animals and plants, some of which are rare, threatened or endangered. Dwellers of the forest villages (tribes of different origins) depend on the leafy greens and medicinal plants here.

Clearing of land is done in the areas around forest villages for the purpose of cultivation. In the dry months of March and April, the ground vegetation of the forest is set on fire with the intention of clearing, adding ash and destroying pests that cause destruction to the plantations.

However, the forest fire burns the entire ground cover, killing plants and animals, including rare and endangered organisms. The forest personnel hold the local villagers responsible for this. This is not acceptable, as fire is started at places far away from the villages. Besides, the forest workers should be responsible for looking after the forests.

Moreover, the planting of trees for economic benefit has a negative effect on the formation and growth of herbs, and has already caused great damage to the local weed flora of this region. This has resulted in the herbivorous wild animals moving into the surrounding agricultural land in search of fodder, causing destruction of life and economy.

In case of the Gorumara National Park, 30% of its 7945.28 ha area is covered by grasslands. The remaining area contains plantations of timber-yielding plants like *Tectona*, *Shorea*, *Acacia*, *Michelia*, *Terminalia* and *Ficus*, other fruit-yielding plants, bamboo, shrubs, herbs and about

50 ferns and their allies. This forest area is inhabited by about 36 rhinoceros, 150 elephants, 400 deer, 2500 bison and many other small herbivores for which a large quantity of fodder is required. In this context, think of the situation if the forest weed covers are destroyed by intentional fire.

The Forest Department should bear in mind that the forest land is not meant for economically valuable timber plants and tourism, but for a whole range of biotic members of the ecosystem. Continuation of these activities will totally damage the ground vegetation, thereby harming the forest ecosystem. Proper management strategies should be framed and implemented to avoid critical situations.

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