On the tragedy of geology and geologists

The article by Valdiya1 entitled ‘The tragedy of being a geologist’ is thought-provoking. The article was received by Current Science on 11 November 2011 and accepted on 16 November 2011. Not many geologists in India are as lucky as Valdiya for such a swift publication. The lament is not so much that of a geologist as that of Valdiya himself. Current Science has published a bold but strange article which emphasizes the plight of geologists but also includes many figures/diagrams from other publications. Valdiya’s account on the plea of the geologists raises a mixed reaction. The article which emphasizes the plight of geologists who spend most of their time in the fields and the hardships played by the geologists in exploring the natural resources and their plight as a scientist. Altogether, he has written a brief account lamenting over the government bodies, associations and institutes for sidelining geologists and has criticized the administrative bodies of these organizations.

Valdiya, an academician has been associated with institutions like Kumaon University, Lucknow University and currently with the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research. He is a geologist who has undoubtedly helped in the traverse mapping of the Himalayas. However, the points articulated in his writing indicate the opinion of one and may not represent that of the major- ity. He points out that the major geological institutions are headed/guided by non-geologists, for example, Geological Survey of India, the premier organization was headed by non-geologists for many years, is sternly guided by IAS in Ministry of Mines, a national Institute of Geology of Himalayas has been functioning for the last five years under the Chairmanship of Secretary to Government of India, a chemist specialized in leather technology and the Director is a micropalaentologist. But during such appointments the geological community did not protest or demand a change. For instance, Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun some years ago was headed by a geophysicist, and not someone with basic experience in Himalayan geology. Valdiya fails to mention anything about this and others in his article, but laments the fact that the micropalaentologist heading the Institute now is a summer monsoon specialist.

Out of the several points raised by Valdiya, deep drilling is an activity which needs considerable expertise and immediate attention. Secondly, his writing is commendable for highlighting the plight of geologists who spend most of their time in the fields and the hardships faced by geologists who work in rough terrains or adverse weather conditions. But I feel that the article should have either discussed the plight of the geologists or could have been an account on natural resources. It criticizes the existing system and is a less elaborate account on natural resources or the role played by the geologists in their exploration.

I extend my appreciation to Current Science for publishing this article which has given an opportunity to discuss issues of prime importance. Valdiya’s efforts are laudable for writing a provocative piece which may help address a few of these issues.

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