

fact as to why we fell back. Is it completely our fault (I mean our universities), or is it too much reliance on the new laboratories set-up after independence because of which university tradition and its creative impulses in our country slowly dried up, and a new stream was directed towards the national laboratories? Through setting up of laboratories outside the university, did we establish a new post-independence and distorted caste system in academia? Didn't we dissect, through this means, UG teaching and research completely that Lavakare<sup>1</sup> wants again to be entwined? Did we fill our university positions with less gifted people through petty politicization of the campuses where unfortunately, even some powerful scientists got (or get) involved? Did we destroy dissent in science completely, thereby bringing into it a tendency of glorifying 'Sir and Madam' at any cost for personal gains? We must look back and reflect on these questions, as a reflective mind gives rise to wisdom. We must change course if need be.

Good science compels us to become absolutely objective and action-oriented. Revival of universities may come through course correction. We need at this hour honorable professors having erudition and integrity to change the system. Perhaps, the system will change – sooner or later – automatically or under compulsion. But change it must.

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1. Lavakare, P. J., *Curr. Sci.*, 2016, **111**(7), 1146–1147.
  2. Jain, G., *Selected Nobel Laureates' Prize Acceptance Speeches*, MG Books, New Delhi, p. 71; ISBN 978-81-906278-7-0.
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### Response:

My commentary was in response to the guest editorial by T. V. Ramakrishnan (TVR)<sup>1</sup> on the subject 'Rediscovering universities', where he had given several specific and phase-wise suggestions for

bringing about changes in our university system. Chaudhuri should have referred to the original editorial and not only make comments on my limited response to the original issues raised by TVR. For example, my reference to France and Germany is in response to what TVR has written on the new initiatives being taken by these two countries in linking national laboratories to their universities. Why are we so touchy about adopting best practices from other parts of the world? We adopted the British system of universities and affiliated colleges after independence and gave up our 'guru-shishya' parampara of traditional times. We adopted the American system for our IITs when we took the help of a group of universities from the US to set up IIT Kanpur. We are now adopting the 'credit' and semester-based system of the Western countries. These are good changes that have to be brought in with changing times. Chaudhuri has quoted a 'foreign' scientist Purcell in emphasizing the role of global research in our laboratories. Why could he not quote C. V. Raman, an Indian Nobel laureate who said that in India we need 'science, and more science' to emphasize the need for scientific research in the country. Why are we still so repugnant of foreign models, but still love to quote them?

The focus of my commentary was to enhance scientific research in our universities using the existing large infrastructure of national laboratories created by the Government. Unfortunately, the so-called mandate of national laboratories like CSIR has kept the university system isolated from using the benefits of these excellent R&D facilities. Recently, the CSIR-National Chemical Laboratory, Pune, has set a good example by giving away a large part of its land and some of its top scientists in setting up the 'university' system of IISER, Pune. Many more national laboratories could have such nexus with the degree-giving Education and Research system that has been ranked amongst the top 100 in the National Framework for Institutional Ranking. The example of Feynman could be emulated by top-notch scientists in national laboratories and top-ranked universities by requesting these scientists to teach UG students from nearby colleges.

I fully agree with him that university education is not to be confined only to

developing excellence in research and teaching in science and technology, but should also include humanities and social sciences. What has been recommended for national science laboratories could also be applied to specialized institutes (though not many exist) in the field of social science. ICSSR should adopt several of our universities and promote research in social science and encourage its scientists to get involved with university students and teachers.

Finally Chaudhuri is demanding that 'academic respectability' has to be given to the university teaching profession. I believe that academic respectability has to be 'earned' by the teachers. Unfortunately, unlike our tradition of 'Guru-shishya', today our teachers do not dedicate themselves fully to their students (and hence perhaps vice versa). Often I have asked students about their role models amongst the teachers and have got no response at all. Unfortunately, most of the teachers are no longer able to 'earn' the respect that Chaudhuri wants to be 'given' to them. Either due to their lack of up-to-date knowledge or their reluctance to 'learn' with the students, most of the teachers are isolating themselves from the students. With this environment, how can they expect to receive 'academic respectability'. My experience as a student and a teacher has been a pleasant one because I think my teachers took a lot of interest in me, talking to me, spending quality time with me – inside and outside the classroom – and so did I with my students. Earning 'academic respectability' is a major challenge to be considered seriously by the academic community. It cannot come from an official order from the UGC!

In conclusion, one shares the dismay Chaudhuri has shown about our university education system, but the academic community should also point the finger inwards and see what it can do to change rather than blame the rest of the world.

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1. Ramakrishnan, T. V., *Curr. Sci.*, 2016, **110**, 1879–1880.
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