tem, the pernicious influence of caste and religious attitudes, the elitist bias, the alienation it produces in students and the decreasing allocation in terms of our GNP for education by the Government.

Remedies for these lie in pressuring the Government to implement the suggestions accepted on the basis of the Commissions and Working Group Reports. An alternative education structure with a slant towards self-sufficient primary and +2 stages, vocational orientation of courses and encouragement of respect for all forms of labour will reduce the pennant for students being enrolled for qualification purposes. This will help in delivering better quality of subjects to more interested students. The wherewithal for this lies in the question of monies meted out by the Government for Education and Science & Technology. However, the driving force must come from the commitment, attitude and effort originating 'from anyone who cares for, and is concerned about, our scientific future'.

An example that this is not pure rhetoric but is feasible is provided, at the school level, by the success of the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Programme (HSTP)\(^6\).\(^7\). A major objective of the programme, which was initiated by choice, was to attempt changes within the organized education system through innovation and modification of pedagogic methods and curricula, rather than to prove, by opening some new schools, the viability of a few islands of possible excellence.

'It is not the best who dies, but he that dies to something greater than himself.'

At the University level, attempts to foster excellence and productivity through creation of massively endowed Universities, whatever the arrangement of the nitty gritty details, will only be deleterious to the cause of improvement in overall standards of research and education that such adventures espouse. It will further the stratification and erosion amongst our students whilst condemning the existing infrastructures to the ruins of history.


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National Science University—Imported drug for an impoverished patient?

Current Science brought out a special section dealing with a so-called new concept ‘National Science University’, the proposal (in an edited form) and some reactions. Having read the articles, and being a ‘Mere Resident Indian’ (MRI) working scientist, I could not help reacting a little and putting down my ‘Swadeshi’ views on this topic, at the same time echoing some of the thoughts expressed by D. Balasubramanian and T. V. Ramakrishnan.

My very first reaction on reading through the ‘Mahajan proposal’, particularly the beginnings was one of extreme familiarity, as I have been hearing and experiencing all that is said, in the last eighteen years of my working life here. Anyway, the ills mentioned are nothing special for science—it is just the Indian ethos reflected in every walk of life. However, in science these ills look worse because of a general feeling that, practitioners of science ought to be above common desires. Coming to the suggestions for the National Science University, does one really believe that making available US $ 50,000 would simply make the person change his/her basic instincts? Having an International(!) Advisory Committee and freedom from bureaucracy make one a better scientist? Regarding the general performance, is it a fact that the scientific standards are low in all other institutions except the two mentioned in the report? What is the criterion that one should adopt for comparison of intra-institutional performances within the country? How much introspection has been made in this context and why should an NRI proposal be considered as the answer for putting Indian science on an international pedestal at a cost of Rs 200 crores of the Indian tax payers? From the report and the articles that appeared alongwith, it almost looks that ‘the NSU is fait accompli’ and if so it may not be of much use to discuss anything now. If it is not, it is very pertinent to discuss the particular points raised by both D. Balasubramanian and T. V. Ramakrishnan regarding the role of NRIs in this venture and for the demand of a new set of framework exclusively for NSU.

Further, as they both point out, the report on the one hand points a finger at the ‘quota’ system as being responsible.
Support NSU but!

It is gratifying to note that Mahajan's proposal1 for National Science University (NSU) has triggered a long over-due discussion on education and science. The Guest Editor of Current Science Balaram2 hopes to have a debate which could 'prove valuable in setting an agenda for the future'. Earlier this year John Maddox has written an article on 'Science in India' (Nature, 1993, 366, 611-626). P. N. Srivastava has raised a number of issues concerned with science, education, excellence and accountability in his Presidential address to the Indian Science Congress (January, 1994). NSU proposal could not be looked in isolation from the prevailing situations in education and science in the country.

We had excellence both in science and education in our universities when they had eminent scientists such as P. C. Ray, J. C. Bose, C. V. Raman, M. N. Saha, S. N. Bose, K. S. Krishnan and many others. They produced many students who joined universities and proved excellent teachers and also did good science. However, things changed after the independence with the coming of H. J. Bhabha and S. S. Bhatnagar on the scene of Indian Science. They were close to Pandit Nehru and they initiated the concept of big science and big institutions for science removed from the universities. A number of good scientists moved from the universities to various institutions set up by AEC, CSIR, ICAR, DRDO and others. The Universities became poorer not only in men but also in finances since the institutionalized science needed big