

Taxonomists vs field biologists

Gone are those days where systematic biologists had their due recognition and reward for their profession. In today's scenario, though, basically a person is a systematic biologist he/she has to attach him/her self with ecology, physiology or biochemistry, molecular biology or tissue culture research for survival. If a researcher still remains in the domain of morphotaxonomic research, he/she will be considered outdated by the funding agencies, journals, fellow researchers and also by the student community. After the arrival of modern 'hitech' lines of research, the vital and basic field like taxonomy has been ignored along with its practitioners. But the fact remains that, large tracts of our land and sea are still left unexplored for their biological wealth.

To share the views with Ganeshiah (*Curr. Sci.*, 1998, 75, 412), to reduce the burden of field biologist by taxonomists, it is felt that, it is at the most clear now that taxonomists cannot remain in their

respective domain, the syllabi in biology curriculum from graduate level itself must have a combination of all research aspects of biology starting from taxonomy to molecular biology. The Ph D programmes in biology also must encourage interdisciplinary research aspects. This will enable the understanding of a particular taxon in a detailed manner and hence the following troubles like:

(i) Using a very narrow morphotaxonomic concept to define a genus or species—overlooking the wide variability of character in the natural conditions; (ii) Species descriptions and illustrations based on a few samples from single collections, without studying the characteristics of their populations; and (iii) Nomenclatural changes which arise in taxa that are poorly studied and described; can be avoided. In order to arrive at a solution to these problems permanently, a sound national and regional level reference collection/botanic and zoologic gardens/culture collections/gene

banks for micro- to macro-organisms is immediately required.

It is also annoying that except for a few journals, we do not have journals at the national level exclusively to publish results of taxonomic research, hence most of our taxonomic literature appear in foreign journals. Worse than this, is the lack of any agency/mechanism in our country, to note the new description at a national level, to register the discovery as an add up to our biodiversity. We must also think in terms of forming a transparent regional level networking with a national level headquarters of field and taxonomic biologists for a better co-operation and for a better understanding of our biological diversity.

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Research fellows: A bleak future

I obtained my PhD in physics from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi in 1989. I was appointed as a Senior Research Associate in the National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi. However, the Senior Research Associateship (SRA) expired on 30 June 1998. After 15 years of research in planetary and atmospheric sciences, I am now on the road. There are many others like me who have abandoned all hopes of pursuing a scientific career, because we fail to get suitable jobs in keeping with our academic qualifications.

I have tried to discuss this issue with several people but there seems to be no answer to this. Thus, at the age of 35 or to nearabouts, some of us do not have a permanent position, seem to be without any hopeful future, and in addition we have the responsibility of a family.

I have come to know through newspapers that a few SRAs have approached the court, and the court has extended their fellowship till they get permanent positions. I too have filed an application with CAT. The government needs to review its policy regarding granting and

extending of fellowships. According to the present policy, the extension of these fellowships depends solely on the progress of the candidate. But, if a candidate fails to get a *permanent* position, he/she has no alternative for sustenance.

Urgent action to this problem is needed so that misuse of government money as well as our exploitation can be checked.

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