

Worker scientists vs manager scientists

This is regarding the letter by Brijesh Barathwal, entitled 'working scientists – who cares' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1999, 77, 483).

The contention of Barathwal that senior scientists and academicians contribute very little to teaching and research activities is regrettable. Barathwal is perhaps dejected and has made sweeping and casual remarks in a confused state mixing up all issues. A demarcation between worker scientists and manager scientists is not apt since manager scientists have also started their career as worker scientists and have reached a high post (Director, Deputy Director, etc.) due to hard work, expertise, and monitoring and supervising capabilities. In the present-

day context, the awareness, accountability, technical and administrative compulsions call for a careful management, which cannot be tackled by a young worker scientist. A premier scientific organization has its own management board working under a ministry controlled by the administrative and financial authority. The ministry is the final decision-making authority and the department can only project its requirement, expansion stagnation, etc.

A review of the present working system and conditions taking into consideration the career prospects from recruitment to retirement is needed. The scientific community should give respect

to experience, capability and merit and they should remain united for prosperity of the nation rather than casting aspersions on a premier scientific organization, which is more than 150 years old, without going into details of the present-day working conditions. Such letters that voice personal grievances could have been edited and presented in a much better way in such a leading scientific magazine.

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Shall we kill big conferences?

This refers to K. N. Ganeshiah's opinion on 'The Kumbh melas of science: Time to kill (them)' (*Curr. Sci.*, 1999, 77, 739–741). To kill them (big scientific conferences) is no solution – and most certainly not scientific. It is like killing an old animal which has stopped serving us. Extending the irrationality further, shall we kill an old man who apparently has no utility for the society? In this connection I remember the example of my elder brother (86 years) who was an inmate of the Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry and was very sick, almost confined to bed in his room. Even in his sick condition, the Ashram had given him the work – a simple and manageable work of putting the 'Blessings of Mother' in small envelopes to be sent to devotees, just to make my brother feel that he was still useful to the Ashram. The same philosophical attitude can be extended to the big conferences like the one Ganeshiah mentions in Botany or in any other discipline or even the Indian Science Congress Association. Let us now try to see the scientific relevance in these big conferences.

Firstly, these conferences offer opportunities to travel far and wide, which is an education in itself. It broadens our

outlook. It sharpens our observation and makes us more knowledgeable. Secondly, one has the opportunity to know the culture and traditions of different places which leads us to an emotional integration, so necessary in this world which is considered to be a family. Thirdly, it offers an opportunity to listen to useful lectures by competent scientists, who are experts in their fields. Fourthly, it enables us to meet fellow scientists and to interact with them academically and socially.

If one does not find the desired academic level in any conference, or if one experiences inconveniences regarding food, accommodation and transport, time-schedule and movement from one section/lecture to another, etc., these are all organizational shortcomings and not because it is a big conference. I have attended one Indian Science Congress which I remember even today for its excellent arrangements. One has to attend big conferences with a prepared and open mind for not expecting much comfort and conveniences. There are scientists who may be quite interested in their subject, but comfort is their top priority and they would not mind missing even the best of these conferences. Therefore, if I have

bitter experiences of one or more of such conferences, there is no reason why I should advise others not to attend them. Surely there is no point in killing them.

Since the author has drawn a parallel between Kumbh melas and big scientific conferences, by implication he would like to have a ban on the Kumbh melas (?) This may not be possible since religion and spiritualism are so deep-rooted in our country. (Incidentally, I have gone several times to Har Ki Padi in the previous Kumbh mela at Haridwar but I never felt the urge to have a dip in the Ganges.) Kumbh melas might have lost the original relevance and purpose for which they were started by our ancestors, yet they (melas) continue to bind us together in spite of all sorts of diversities in the country. The question of faith does not arise in case of conferences, but they do serve the limited purpose of bringing different people, of different disciplines, and of varying rationalities together for greater mutual understanding.

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