

## Eclipsing of academics

An important academic issue appears in the disguise of improvised phraseology of 'sunset and sunrises'. These are regular phenomena and we hardly question them, except at the poles where the phenomena of 'sunset and sunrise' or of 'sunrise and sunset' appear drastically different. What really is the intention of the speaker in referring to the usage of sunset (referred to in the Editorial, *Curr. Sci.*, 2000, **79**, 133–134) remains a matter of interpretation in the light of the detailed speech or talk in the meeting. If it means an enlightened 'exit policy' as outlined by the editor, it is a matter of concern to the academic community which is already facing problems of survival. No doubt, prematurely terminating research activity once started, is neither easy nor pleasant, except in very special cases of act of misappropriations. In doing so, one may lose unforeseen scientific gains. It is high time that the funding agencies develop different sets of rules for different types of research, namely theoretical and experimental. A team of national experts should discuss the cause of declining trend of experimental research. Technical laboratory support has died down, which is one of the prime requirements for experimental research. The academic system in our country is passing through a very difficult phase where job promotions are on the basis of length of teaching, irrespective of the quality of teaching. The in-service teachers engaged in research have strange compulsions. It seems that for promotion, research output, publications in international journals, etc. do not compensate for the requirement of attending summer schools and orientation programmes. The

seriousness of summer schools and orientation programmes is questionable and has hampered the research efforts, especially among younger teachers. As a consequence, the younger generation is keen to attend summer schools and orientation programmes rather than running scientific research projects. It is a great setback to academic development in our country.

In fact, this is the time to discuss the manifestation of extended 'eclipse' time rather than 'sunsets and sunrises'. The obvious problem is that academics and high level research is nobody's choice these days. One can easily see the attitude of the guardians and the young students striving hard for medical and engineering degrees. Who is concerned about 'sunsets and sunrises' as we debate? A majority of the educated who are doing business, work hard and look eagerly for the 'sunset' to enjoy and retire comfortably for the 'sunrise'. In the prevailing system of automatic promotions, no one can stop even the most non-deserving teacher in the department from getting promoted. There is still a small cross-section of individuals though, who have dedicated themselves to academics, research and development because of their own compulsions. Many of our senior scientists who once did good work, are now busy in cashing one award after another and are leaving one position to take up another. It is unfortunate that there is no forum in the country to promote real scholarship of any kind whatsoever. Even the experts, institutional and organizational heads feel that talent and its promotion is the responsibility of teachers and scientists. The scheme of

time-bound promotions is academically unsound and has left a permanent scar on academics. Creative academic work is a broad spectrum of activity such as running scientific research projects, creative writing, consultancy projects and public demonstrations. The dedicated scientists, academicians and researchers have to face hard time in getting their routine work done. Instead of getting proper facilities and an inspiring atmosphere for carrying out their research work, invariably they have to face unforeseen hurdles, hazards and bottlenecks.

New institutions are mushrooming without adequate planning and preparedness. One has to reject some of these institutions which tend to be like poisonous mushrooms. The fittest among them may survive and do good to the society. Inculcating academic culture is the call of the day, at any cost whatsoever. If it is not done in time, the country has to pay a heavy price and suffer an irreparable loss.

Our experience of the past half a century clearly shows that academicians in governmental jobs, concerned with their positions do not express freely and frankly on academic developmental programmes. Most of these academicians tend to toe the line of governmental policy. It is high time that the feedback and evaluation of our academic system by students should also be introduced with well-debated modifications compared to what prevails in USA.

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## Need for easy access to published information

One of the many components required to improve scientific research in the country is easy access to the scientific literature. Fortunately the IT revolution has brought it to our doorsteps. While institutional and individual access to the Internet from the country is expanding rapidly, published information is not within easy reach of most scientists in universities and other research organizations. One of the ways of opening the door to published infor-

mation is to have a national licence to access the webofscience.com of Institute for Scientific Information (ISI). While the scientometry aspect of the web of science is often talked about, for the scientist without a self-sufficient institutional library, this search facility is invaluable. Direct access by the user through the Internet to webofscience would help everybody. Since the expenses and the benefits involved are large,

would the concerned ministries come in quickly to help the cause of scientific research by getting a national accessibility agreement, e.g. for SCIE of ISI?

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