Women in scientific research in India

One area of science administration that needs a lot of improvement is the opportunities for women in science in our country. We have a large number of women who are capable of excellent work, but have been unable to reach their full potential due to extraneous reasons. For women, particularly of the previous generation, profession and personal lives were often conflicting. One had to choose between the two. The situation has changed a little now, but still, the fact remains that if a couple wants to have children, someone has to look after them. In the previous generation, the wife however brilliant, gave up her career and stayed at home; thereby the nation lost a scientist. In this generation, the wife and husband work, but the grandmothers look after the kids. However the next generation grandmothers are not going to do so. Existing childcare facilities are abysmal and no thinking parent would leave a child to such 'care'. I have seen many brilliant women who either give up their budding scientific careers or take on some mediocre, less demanding jobs. Science administrators should address this problem. Women often do more creative work and are often less worried about promotions. Losing women scientists is a great loss that has been underestimated by science administrators. In other areas of work, there may not be flexibility in working hours (you cannot run a bank during evening hours only), but for science, such restrictions need not exist. More women should be encouraged to take up research in a flexible time schedule (part-time work, working from home, etc.). We need to set up good childcare facilities in research and teaching institutions.

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A scientist's view of philosophy of 'giving'

A recent issue of *Current Science* (10 May 2003, **84**) is worth keeping as a 'souvenir'. One article impressed me the most, but from a different perspective. If an opinion poll is taken, I am sure 90–95% readers would put the article by Krishnan *et al*. on 'Tissue specific localization of β-carotene and iron in transgenic indica rice (*Oryza sativa* L.)' (pp. 1232–1234) the best and 70–75% would rate the excellent article by Garg and Gupta on 'Decline in science education in India – A case study at + 2 and undergraduate level' (pp. 1198–1201) as a close second. My first choice is the moving, and beautiful obituary on Vinod Modi by Narasimha. It came straight from the heart and was touching. It reinforced one of the simplest philosophies I have myself learnt late in life, the humbling philosophy of 'giving' rather than taking. The line 'He often returned the prize-money he won to his award-givers – sometimes with a supplementary matching contribution from himself; so his wife Mira is reported to have complained that they could no longer afford her husband's prizes' was moving. I learnt the philosophy of 'giving' by a chance encounter with an old, sick, beggar woman. Stopping to give her some change, I realized after taking out my wallet that I did not have any. Since I was committed, I gave her the lowest denomination note I had, i.e. Rs 10. I had to walk away embarrassed when the poor lady had tears rolling down and held the note tightly, lest it gets blown away. Vinod Modi learnt the philosophy of 'giving' earlier than many of us, a philosophy buried deep in the archives of all religions, but conveniently forgotten by all of us in the daily grind of life.

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'Sensor camera' on comets

Whenever I find time from my hectic schedule (I am a trader), my passion for nature and the universe drives me towards the 'Discovery Channel'.

While watching some of the programmes on 'Comets', an idea clicked in my mind which I would like to share with the scientists working in the field.

Is it possible to install some kind of a device like a 'Sensor Camera' on one of the comets when it is nearest to the Earth, so that we can have a good number of photographs of different celestial bodies/objects during the course of their travel. This will help unravel the so far hidden myths about these far-flung objects in the universe.

Researchers working in the field may like to think over this idea and its feasibility.

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