

## The standard of doctoral programmes

With reference to the correspondence on the deteriorating quality of theses generally, a student comes to know about research when a dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of a PG degree. The topic is not selected, but assigned by the teacher. Even in the allotment of students in some institutions, a lottery system is adopted to avoid misunderstanding among colleagues. Naturally, with meagre facilities and resources, constrained by limited time, the student grabs any opportunity to complete his work, including plagiarism. Invariably, the dissertation lies idle on the shelf until used by the next student. If the candidate is NET-qualified, he/she has some choice, but here too the premier institutes have their own screening tests. Left out are the majority of the institutions that readily accommodate those who crave to do a Ph D, even as a non-stipendiary scholar. The scholar is neither aware of the impact factor nor the quality of conferences and the credits such ventures will bring when he/she appears for an SRF interview. But in conferences, he/she

sees how the papers are 'read' and follows the same trend. Finally the guide really helps by choosing the 'right' panel of Indian and foreign examiners. The comments arrive as expected, favourably. At the most, the thesis is recommended for the award of the degree after making some minor corrections in the thesis before *viva voce*, or the author is advised to check the mistakes before the thesis is published. On the day of the *viva voce*, the student reads out the projected transparencies for the audience, providing an audio-visual effect.

After a few formal questions the *viva voce* is over; and if any tough questions are raised the guide readily stands and explains, defending the candidate. The examiner announces that the candidate is recommended for the award of a Ph D degree. The acid test is when the student enters the interview hall to be grilled by the committee, without being backed by a godfather. A vicious cycle thus begins, if he is appointed. The scenario I paint here is dismal, but it is true in most cases.

The standard of research has not attained a plateau, but is taking a downward plunge. Hence before the Ph D degree is awarded it may be made mandatory to get the essence of the thesis published in reputed journals. This is in practice in many institutions, but it is only optional. The list of such standard journals can be prepared by the UGC and sent to the institutions concerned. This will at least provide an unbiased assessment of the work done. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the guide and the student to rise up to the occasion. That would be the real tribute to stalwarts like S. Ramaseshan, as indicated in the editorial of the recent *Current Science* issue. Essentially, the standard of research per se rests on the guide.

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## Instrumentation facilities for research in India

In a recently published correspondence<sup>1</sup>, the author has rightly pointed out improper use of instrumentation facilities. I have also some additional points to share. It is indeed a matter of concern that despite an increase in the fund availability for the purchase of instruments, no proportional improvement is seen in research output by the universities. Obviously, something is wrong in the proper utilization of the fund. UGC and other funding agencies do not bother to physically verify the proper utilization of the fund and the equipment. Sometimes, the purchased instrument is kept only as a showpiece and not a single publication is made using the sanctioned instrument even after 4–5 years of its

procurement. Is this not wastage of money?

In my opinion, the funding agencies should not think that their job is limited to the sanction of the fund and receiving the utilization certificate. They should also see that a costly instrument is installed properly, maintained perfectly and freely available to all interested users.

When a substantial amount of money is sanctioned as instrument grant, UGC should also have the provision for the posts of maintenance engineer and other staff. Once an instrument is maintained properly and made available to all researchers (maybe with nominal charges), research output will increase.

Above all, everyone concerned should think seriously about the proper and maximum utilization of the instrumentation facilities.

1. Das, D., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**, 1115.

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