

## Crorepati scientist!

Gupta<sup>1</sup> has suggested that a cash prize of Rs 5000 be awarded to the best paper in each area to lure scientists to publish their papers in Indian science journals as one of the steps to improve their quality. I think it is a novel idea that deserves wider attention than it might have received. I would like to go even a step further to suggest that similar cash rewards, and not awards, may be given to each paper that gets accepted in these journals, the amount of which can be decided by the referees based on a 10-point scale. For a journal like *Current Science* having 24 issues, each with 8–10 communications, this will mean an additional funding of Rs 10–12 lakhs per year, which is not difficult to raise today if one or two sponsors can be roped in. If required, scientists can sport their logos in appropriate places or even become brand ambassadors of the sponsors. This will also lead to healthy competition among the Indian science journals based on their offers of prize money. On the negative side, the number of multi-author papers will come down, obviously to maximize the share of the reward money. If our

cricketers can get sponsors to pay them for every four or six they score, I wonder why our scientists should not be paid rewards for every paper they publish. Just imagine how much money a scientist will make who publishes 20 papers per year or those who are having 300–400 papers to their credit. One of my scientist friends (name withheld) was lamenting that in spite of having so many awards in India, including the proposed India Science Award, the combined prize money a scientist can accumulate here is still falling short of Rs 1 crore. I think that the gap can be bridged easily with the proposed 'reward for paper' scheme and we can have many such 'crorepati' scientists.

On a serious note, I believe that while scientists can feel free to publish papers based on private funded projects in any journal of their choice, our government funding agencies can enforce that all the research works carried out with their money are published only in Indian journals, à la Swadeshi approach. This, of course, will require different yardsticks to be adopted by the funding agencies

while measuring the performance of any project or of any scientist for promotion, awards, etc. which, unfortunately, rely more heavily on weights (impact factors) than content. In addition to this, in the beginning, we should be trying to improve the quality of only one journal in each area, for example one journal in chemical sciences, one in biological sciences and so on and also restrict the number of issues per year. Finally, these journals should have an international board of editors and, more importantly, international referees to improve and to have less biased opinions about the qualities of the accepted papers.

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1. Gupta, Y. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **86**, 241.

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## Cause of Indian famines, transgenics, and protecting Indian farmers

*'As India must be bled, the lancet should be directed to the parts where the blood is congested, or at least sufficient, not to those already feeble of the want of it.'*

—Lord Salisbury

The data presented by Bhatia<sup>1</sup> do not necessarily prove that the Indian famines during the period 1750–1943 are due to failure in agriculture, as the author implies. On the contrary, their distribution over time indicates that there must have been some other causes. After all the same agricultural techniques were supporting a far more larger population in the nineteen fifties.

The cause of the famine is amply stated in the above quotation. Negligence of irrigation infrastructure, draconian taxation, forced cotton planting for the mills of England at the expense of food crops, and, of course, forced opium planting are the main causes of Indian famines during that period. There are volumes written on

the true causes of these Indian famines. One only needs to read them! The opium grown in India was then free-traded in China under gun point.

It is impossible to think of a greater threat to planet Earth than that posed by transgenic life forms. The danger is even incomparably greater than that posed by nuclear wastes or a global nuclear war, because in contrast to radioactivity which is relatively localized and which by nature decays with time, transgenic life forms are capable of reproduction and are able to transfer their genes to other life forms. Transgenic life forms have the potential to poison the entire planet. All the tests are not reassuring when one considers the history of these tests. After all DDT was sprayed all over the world after the tests showed that it was safe. The truth is that, contrary to all the hype, even the understanding of the functioning of a single cell, let alone the complex evolution of the planet, is rather limited. This does

not mean that India should not conduct any research on genetic engineering. On the contrary, research is necessary to discover and thwart (if) possible dangers that can be caused by transgenic life forms.

Finally, India could defend her farmers by simply ignoring the so-called laws created by other nation(s) to suit their own interests. Even if this leads to a military confrontation, India has the technical capabilities to defend herself. India always had the technical capabilities to defend herself. Only the will has been and is missing.

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1. Bhatia, C. R., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**, 1252.

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