

Miles to go . . .

Gupta¹ has addressed a relevant and burning issue regarding Indian science. However, the process that he has suggested shows a weak, fragile and self-pitiable face of Indian science and Indian scientists. Why at all should we request, forcibly get submitted or for that matter take away research proposals to benefit Indian journals? No charity or pseudo encouragement will solve the purpose until it really has the sublimation of strong will and quality of research, by all of us. I feel that science journals are not going to be benefitted by this attitude. Merit and merit alone attached to the journals can fetch attention of Indian and non-Indian scientists. Do we wish to publish the journals only for us and just for the sake of publishing them? Can we per-

form better by force, etc. that too in science, which is all about mental freedom and novel thinking? The reasons for the low standards of our journals are not simple but intriguing. I think that even if good scientific publications come from India in Indian journals, the situation may not change much. We have to analyse why few scientists from western countries publish in our journals, despite dealing with issues, relevant and contemporary to us, while we may find a paper from UK appearing in journals published from Czechoslovakia, Poland, etc. with poor print quality and low impact factor. Why not in Indian journals? What is the deterrent for them? Ultimately, our journals have to be as homogenous in representation as any other journal of international repute.

I also feel that while there could be priorities or policies, there is no national or international science. We do some research just for the sake of doing it or for several reasons as mentioned earlier². Let us take some clues and do our bit to improve our journals and cherish respect world over.

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1. Gupta, Y. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2004, **86**, 241.
 2. Lakhotia, S. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**, 20–23.
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The IIM imbroglio

I refer to the recent decision of the HRD Minister to slash the fees of the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) from Rs 150,000 to Rs 30,000. Although it does not affect me directly, I am concerned with it as a physicist, educationist, and a thinker. It raises certain basic issues on higher education, quality, excellence, self-financed institutions, government's role, etc. In a broader sense, it concerns all of us. I have not liked this step at all. Here are my views.

Nowadays, it is well-known that in some elitist schools, the fee for the kindergarten is Rs 15,000 or more. Several colleges and universities run non-grant (self-financed) courses such as BCS, MCS, MCA, MBA, electronics, instrumentation, and even physics, mathematics, etc. The fees are of the order of Rs 15,000 to 25,000. Private engineering colleges charge an annual fee of Rs 40,000 to 80,000 and medical colleges charge lakhs of rupees. We also know what quality of education our children get even at this price. When compared with these, Rs 30,000 per annum for a degree in IIM is nothing.

I am aware of the principles of social justice, education for all, etc. After all, who does not want education, or anything for that matter, at a lower price?

But I am also in favour of quality and excellence in all pursuits. When we have 10,000 colleges and 300 universities, should we not have even a handful of institutes which could be said to be excellent ones, of international standards?

As soon as a student is selected to join an IIM, banks are more than willing to provide loans. As chairman of IIM, Ahmedabad, N. R. Narayanamurthy has said, no selected student was unable to join on account of higher fees.

All departments of the government, HRD, S&T, Defence, UGC, etc. have started talking about excellence. Let us be pragmatic. In today's world, excellence comes at a price. There are no low-cost short cuts to excellence. The high earnings of the IIM faculty members (through consultancy) and the highly favourable teacher–student ratio are cited as negative points by the government. 'Do you know', they tell us, 'that they have a teacher–student ratio of 1 : 3, better than many business schools in the US!', as if this is something to be ashamed of. On the contrary, I would consider this to be a positive point, and we should be proud of the fact that our IIMs are doing better than many international business schools.

For the last decade or so, the government has started applying budget cuts to institutions of higher education. Colleges, universities and CSIR laboratories are being asked to generate funds through industry support, patents, a variety of self-financed courses, etc. Suppose an institution manages to do that to the full extent, the government should only be happy about it.

A good institution requires not only good faculty but also good infrastructure – hostels, sports facilities, cultural facilities, computer laboratories, enough internet connectivity, and a library with the latest books and journals in various areas.

Neglecting even one of the above aspects may result in falling behind international standards. Many government agencies are willing to give funds for equipment, but hardly any agency provides funds for its maintenance. 'Maintenance is your responsibility', is the standard argument. And who will provide funds for building enough and the best of hostels? Donations, alumni support, fees, private support are the only few channels available for these.

I imagine the following scenario. Suppose I am running a private institute or university, with several faculties. I raise