

Shed cloak of prejudice *vis-à-vis* women

The editorial¹ titled 'Women, Science and the X-chromosome' was lucid and thoughtful. For centuries, man has looked down on women and it is not a surprise that the deeper prejudices pop out now and then. It is truly sad to hear such statements from the Head of a prestigious university like Harvard; it only shows that irrespective of the fact that we consider ourselves civilized, the devil still lurks in the dark. I think the so-called political correctness does not help, because it is merely a change of words and not a change of heart. Just calling an insane man, 'mentally challenged' does not make any difference, if you do not feel compassion for him. Without real kindness and concern, political correctness will go down as just another fad in human history. But, at present, words like love, kindness and concern are used with such callousness, that they seem meaningless in our day-to-day context;

however, without these values, life inevitably will lose its saner side. To overcome all prejudices, one must have a mind not burdened with centuries-old, moth-eaten ideologies. Any mindset can be broken if there is willingness on our part to see things in a larger context. A thousand laws enacted will not change our prejudices or outlook; only a true change of heart will bring about a revolution from within. In the words of the famous philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurthi, 'Human beings throughout the world have been conditioned according to formulas and concepts for thousands of years. I do not know if you have ever questioned why you always live at the conceptual level, why you always formulate an ideology and attempt to live and think at that level, whereas actuality is something entirely different. Actuality is the daily living which has nothing to do with concepts. When our daily life is so heavily

clothed with ideologies, it becomes shoddy, confusing and meaningless'². His words seem so true when we see thousand ideologies and concepts ripping apart the fabric of our present society. I think only by shedding the cloak of prejudice and fixed formulas, will man one day truly consider woman as equal.

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1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2005, **88**, 1017–1018.
 2. Krishnamurthi, J., *Meeting Life*, Krishnamurthi Foundation India, Chennai, 1991, pp. 123–124.
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T. PREM ANAND

*Molecular Biophysics Unit,
Indian Institute of Science,
Bangalore 560 012, India
e-mail: prem@mbu.iisc.ernet.in*

Projects in schools and colleges

Submission of projects or models has become a routine and annual feature of the school and college academic curricula. The intention behind this exercise is that it would arouse curiosity in students for scientific and technical phenomena, provoke them for experimentation, to work independently or in small groups, to search relevant literature from books and journals, to prepare and present documents in written form, to explain and defend the working of the model, and above all, to encourage creativity among students.

Theoretically, these intentions are good and every year millions of school- and college-level students, willingly or unwillingly, submit projects or models for assessment. In return they get marks or grades and a few projects are presented in local, state and national level competitions. At school level this exercise requires a few hundred to couple of thousands of rupees and in technical courses, the task is generally assigned among a small groups of students, and involves some tens of thousands of rupees.

The project work begins in the latter half of the academic session with consent and supervision by teachers of the respective classes. Initially, the project work generates enthusiasm among students, as they get the opportunity to display their calibre. They start work vigorously, but are soon confronted with the reality that relevant detailed literature, despite access to information technology, is not easily available and the fabrication of models is not that easy.

A good number of students see the entire exercise as an unnecessary burden on their already unmanageable syllabus and beyond their capacity. They resort to short cuts like submitting ready-made projects, seeking help from parents, etc.

Even those who are determined to make their own models, at a later stage, find it difficult to pursue work on account of non-availability of required material, improper functioning of models, inadequate guidance, excess time consumption, etc. and adopt practices in vogue. A small number of students succeed by their own efforts, guided by competent faculty.

Another equally relevant issue pertaining to academic institutions is that most of the engineering branches and management college departments are manned by teachers, a good number of whom (in most of the privately run institutions) are fresh graduates with good academic records, sharing bulk of the burden. To expect quality education and commitment from them is like day dreaming.

In principle, it is highly laudable to promote creativity and provide real-life exposure to students. Good intentions lose the professed tracks by involving all without the same motivation and calibre. Project work as well as industrial or professional training should be optional, but not mandatory.

A. K. BIYANI

*Department of Geology,
D.B.S. College,
Dehradun 248 001, India*