

## Seemingly missed identity of a scientist

I read the Guest Editorial<sup>1</sup> with great interest. The events narrated in the column are about the travails of a start-up scientist in his quest for identity. As the article points out, a positive outcome of the efforts invested hinges on the output measured in terms of the number of peer-reviewed publications preferably, if I may add, in journals with high impact factor ratings. This approach appears to be more or less globally accepted and therefore, is the only route to a scientist's upward climb. Quite predictably, if the measured output is low or not visible, the individual suffers from an internal crisis and the events naturally lead to depression.

A major reason for poor output is the rejection of a scientist's work by an anonymous referee. Rejection letters from journals' editors are very depressing even to established skilled workers in the field. After meeting several scientists from India and abroad and based on my own experience, I can suggest a few points to be

taken care of before sending a manuscript for peer review. This can at least avoid negative caustic comments. A referee usually rejects a paper if either of the following aspects of a manuscript receives very low scoring: (a) Clarity of presentation, (b) Attention to details to allow reproducibility, (c) Novelty, (d) Scientific rationale. I agree that scoring high on all these four points in each and every piece of work that we do is not easy. Moreover, high scoring demands 'hard' and 'deep' thinking. Both these points are fused with what we call 'building up the subject'. This exercise demands patience, perseverance and paying attention to detail and reproducibility. Only a few students are able to face this ordeal straight; most tend to break down emotionally midway. Further, in *rare* instances, if the work is original, referees take more time and may even throw back some concerns or apprehensions, which can be usually overcome by supplying additional details

for their satisfaction. Responses from journals with middle level impact factors can be tackled with some effort. Responses from high impact journals are usually capricious.

My advice to Vikram is that he discuss openly with experienced scientists. He need not be depressed. The setback is only momentary. Persistence will bring victory and the seemingly missed identity will come by itself from numerous quarters. This is my own experience.

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1. Chatterji, D., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 141.

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## Scientific ethics needs an integrated statutory model

The Indian Academy of Sciences, Bangalore, has always been a torchbearer in upholding the scientific standards in India, having the privilege of producing scientific journals recognized in the international arena. It is indeed commendable that the Academy is also focusing on probity in the pursuit of science<sup>1</sup>, having come out with a document *Scientific Values: Ethical Guidelines and Procedures – December 2005* to portray ideals in scientific profession, which, of late, has been plagued with complacency in the echelons of science lords and beginners alike. Whereas the suggested guidelines are expected to nurture the culture of honesty, intrinsically the guidelines are intended to invigorate the scientific ethics *only* through the fellowship of the Indian Academy of Sciences. What, then, about those outside the Indian Academy of Sciences, and especially those who have already acquired positions of power, and in turn, the fellowships of various other academies and *vice versa* through doubtful means? In this era of publicity and entrepreneurial culture, even among scientists there is a

strong tendency to 'talk more and work less', acquiring positions of power. Such science lords not only grab the credit of genuine workers to amass disproportionate scientific knowledge<sup>2</sup> but also control professional destiny of talented ones. Balam<sup>3</sup> has aptly underpinned that our scientific system is particularly vulnerable when group heads indulge in unethically questionable practices. As such, there is a need to expose such unethical scientists and science lords engaged in misallocation of credits across the scientific institutions as a whole, and not just to the fellowship of the Indian Academy of Sciences. It is high time that other scientific agencies in the country, including all national academies, CSIR, ICAR, ICMR, UGC, etc. define ethical guidelines to enlarge the presence of whistle-blowers across the scientific community as a whole. Although the Right to Information Act<sup>4</sup>, and the Society for Scientific Values<sup>5</sup> do provide some teeth to expose such culprits, if the culprits themselves are at the helm of affairs, then the whistle-blowers, being at the receiving end carry a huge risk. It is

hoped that in order to salvage our scientific prestige in the international fraternity, the scientific organizations in the country join the said initiative of the Indian Academy of Sciences and work towards creation of an integrated model of scientific values having statutory powers on the pattern of CVC to punish the guilty and safeguard the whistle-blowers. This would go a long way in establishing an internationally competitive scientific culture in India.

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1. [www.ias.ac.in/academy/sci\\_val/scival-report.pdf](http://www.ias.ac.in/academy/sci_val/scival-report.pdf).
  2. Akhila, A., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **90**, 143.
  3. Balam, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **82**, 609–610.
  4. [www.persmin.nic.in/RTI/WelcomerTI.htm](http://www.persmin.nic.in/RTI/WelcomerTI.htm).
  5. [www.scientificvalues.org](http://www.scientificvalues.org).
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