

Deemed or doomed?

Recent debate on deemed university status to national laboratories or granting degrees to researchers has created an environment of mutual suspicion. It is a kind of parallel-processing claiming more and more. Though only universities recognized by the UGC are authorized to grant a degree, the privilege extended to some national laboratories to grant degrees has brought back traditional collision between teachers and scientists¹. Professionalism in universities and national laboratories has a different meaning. In the former, it is more like preparing educated youth to face life. In the latter, it is to train young talent in a structured environment to 'excel'. The 21st century has witnessed new developments in technological and marketing fronts. This has put additional pressure on educational and scientific institutions to perform better. Economic forces demand a new knowledge society. People with multiple skills are preferred to traditional degree-holders.

The inability of national laboratories to create an environment to 'excel' and the universities to produce 'excellent' students has created a void to cater to the needs of changing times. It is being increasingly felt that we need a new breed of science communicators with equal aptitude for research. Research laboratories too should preach, teach and perform to produce high-calibre scientists. Hitherto entrants in national laboratories are products of universities, who are trained in the 'closed doors' and submit their dissertations to universities supposed to be with 'open doors'.

The post-independence period witnessed the establishment of a chain of national laboratories to meet societal and industrial demands. After nearly 60 years we still waver to decide the fate of science graduates. Unable to attract the cream of students to science, we go on changing our policies to meet so called 'gap' in nurturing young talent. It is high time we enhance monetary benefits to science practitioners and make the scientific pro-

fession more attractive. Where are the leaders in science who can motivate more promising learners?

By providing deemed status to national laboratories, we undermine our own university system. It is essential that mushrooming of colleges/universities with deemed status should be stopped. There is an urgent need to reform university education. 'Deemed' students taught by 'deemed' teachers in 'deemed' universities pursuing 'deemed' research from 'deemed' laboratories get doomed. This 'deemed' mania should be treated with surgical skill.

There is a new challenge to managers heading national laboratories, since dissemination of science knowledge is a professional job. New science teachers cum scientists are required to face this challenge². Economic constraints are no more a limiting factor for doing good research; only the will to perform is essential. Science pursuit ought to be an honest occupation and the quality of students produced by the university system affects scientific output. There is an urgent necessity to reform university education and revamp national laboratories to gear up for new challenges³. Institutionalized scientific structures are supposed to ensure the development of a new and different perspective⁴. If radical ideas are to be pursued, we require a system change⁵. Scientists too should become more enterprising and come out of their shell to disseminate new knowledge, which requires an alternate system to deal with new problems with alternate solutions. After all, we live in an age of alternatives!

The state of R&D institutions is discouraging⁶. Absence of accountability on the part of scientists heading departments has been the greatest drawback. If this is the case, how can they take responsibility of guiding a student? An introspection of working conditions in research laboratories is needed. Bad leaders in science are worse than no leaders. Commercialization of education too has far-reaching conse-

quences in producing quality students. Besides, extensive reservation system has worked against the development and propagation of excellence⁶. We need science culture at the societal level and scientific temper at the individual level. The recent (geronto-) phobia of indifference and repudiating disposition characterized by visible apathy towards elderly people (retired) may not augur well for research^{7,8}. As long as we do not make education and scientific research free from political and bureaucratic control, we will fail to realize the true potential of science in nation building⁹. Scientists of high calibre in research and teaching have now withered away under the great banyan trees of mega-organizations performing strategically targetted S&T¹⁰. Time is testimony to the fate of students aspiring to pursue research in research institutions for Ph D degree.

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