

## CORRESPONDENCE

(Ranunculaceae). Furthermore, the colour of their leaves and flowers changes with ambient temperature, from light green to dark violet and from sky blue to mauve respectively. The flowers have aroma, and thus could be used as ornamental plants in the future<sup>3,4</sup>. Their possible extinction will be a loss to the local biodiversity.

In view of the threats, urgent efforts are needed to protect this endangered species through *ex situ* conservation measures. They typically grow in the cracks of rocks; individuals were found only rarely in other types of habitats nearby. When their fruits (Figure 1 c) are

ripe, their stalks curl naturally into the rock cracks where most of their seeds are scattered. Thus, a study of the reproductive ecology, special habitat requirements and distribution of genetic variation among and within populations is necessary.

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## Some additional aspects of gender asymmetry

Singh and Pathak<sup>1</sup> have presented gender asymmetry analysing the performance of girl students in the highly competitive pre-college tests in the backdrop of the CBSE results. While appreciating the analysis, I would like to add some more aspects to this. First, a significant number of students (girls or boys) who secure more than 90% marks in CBSE actually do not appear in the Board examination with such a combination of subjects that would make them eligible to take the IIT-JEE or any other entrance test to the engineering colleges. There is commerce or 'eco, stat, maths' combination and others that students take being fully aware that they will not be eligible for the engineering entrance tests. In fact, quite a few of them target courses like B Com, Law, BBA, BCA, etc. apart from the conventional undergraduate (UG) degree courses. A section of students do secure more than 90% marks with this type of combination. Is it possible to find out the percentage of girl students securing more than 90% in CBSE with the valid science combinations to appear for IIT-JEE or Olympiad? That may give a more comprehensive picture of the girl students' performance in the tests discussed. Secondly, I feel we should also take into account the entrance tests to some of the premiere medical institutions into consideration. Entrance tests like PMT, or those for AIIMS, JIPMER, etc. are some of the high standard competi-

tive examinations that attract a number of good students who have secured high marks in the Board examinations. Some students (girls and boys) are interested in a career in medicine and there is a section among them who have secured more than 90%. There are several coaching classes, spread all over the country, for imparting coaching for medical entrance tests as well. The performance of the girls students should be seen against this backdrop. But there are some additional factors as well.

In India, the social perception about the professional career of an engineer plays a role in the reduced interest of girl students for engineering courses. Even after the emergence of IT, people are aware that a significant number of engineering jobs involves floor shop and shift duties, official travel, long working hours and field work at odd places. Parents usually prefer the professional career of a doctor for their daughters, as it offers flexible working hours, independent work through private practice, social prestige and good earning. The preference of girl students for taking entrance tests to the premiere medical institutions corroborates this. However, I do agree with the authors that girl students show lesser interest in the Olympiads and IIT-JEE. Participation in the Olympiad examinations has apparently got nothing to do with engineering, but it has been observed over the years that students

selected for representing India in the International physics and chemistry Olympiads are among the high rankers in IIT-JEE and have received training in different coaching classes. Hence the girl students are also lacking in the Olympiads.

In this context, I would also like to point out to a slightly different but related issue. The number of girl students in the UG science classes is also dwindling. The serious concern about the lesser number of women in science actually stems from here. Even after doing science in the high school and performing well, girls are not joining UG science courses, because of several other better options that have emerged in the last two decades or so leading to attractive career prospects. Thus, there is a serious shortage of women role models in science. This may lead to a domino effect. And it appears that the highly competitive examinations like IIT-JEE or the Olympiads selection tests will not have increased number of girl students in the near future.

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