

*Letter to Editor***Research and Education in India — Have We Lost Focus?**

The Editorial by S C Lakhota in the December 2015 issue has crisply and powerfully portrayed the failures in Indian science as much as could be done within the permitted space. This editorial is comprehensive, thought provoking, meaningful and purposeful. But the question that rings loudly is whether all of it will fall, if at all and in the rightful manner, in the ears of the primary administrators of Indian policies.

Sometimes I feel desperate that I need to share some of my thoughts similar to what the editor has relayed in this editorial, especially with regard to the quality of science generated in India. But then I ask myself if I have any moral right to say so, since I left India nearly two decades ago. Nevertheless, my interest in India and its science is nurtured by regularly accessing *Current Science*, which holds the freedom of scientific thinking in India up and high in spite of various issues and problems faced by its editors.

One tragedy of India is that we have too much of freedom. For every action there is not one equal and opposite reaction, but many. These multiple reactions become a drag force on the thought that may enable betterment. This is a general remark and this has nothing pointedly towards the editorial.

In my understanding of Indian politics and, therefore, their policies, each politician wants to retain power at any cost. In this scenario, where money will be available for any research? The easiest way to circumvent the issue is to pass the buck to (private) industries and tell the researchers to seek their support. Politicians have found an easy escape route. Do they realize that privately funded research will be available only to those who funded and not to the Nation as a whole?

That apart, I think we scientists too need to do serious introspection. Before I left India for good, I was a member of the program advisory panels of some of the major funding agencies. I was much younger then than today and therefore maturity of mind was

naturally poorer. In spite of those deficiencies, one argument I always placed in the meetings I attended, was ‘do the outcomes of various projects commensurate with the monies awarded?’ The Chairpersons and fellow members of the committees were often unhappy with such questions. Unable to accept the lacklustre attitude, I resigned my membership and it coincided with my departure. These are the sort of issues I experienced while in India; I hope things have changed for the better since then. Thus the government only is not at fault. We scientists too have not responded and reciprocated to the Nation in the most ideal manner as most of us do not seem to have cared to keep the welfare of the Nation as top priority.

One other element, which I feel has been thoroughly ignored, is the disproportionate disbursement of monies by governments. A quick analysis of the investment priority of the Ministry of Human Resources in 1990s reveals that out of a rupee meant for education support, a substantial proportion of was diverted to IITs (5) and IIMs (5); a similar chunk went to fund Central Universities, the a modestly smaller proportion to the remainder of universities and colleges, and the remainder, a paltry sum, went to secondary and primary school education. Have the IITs and IIMs returned the investment back to the Nation? I am not sure, since I never got to work out these details. One convenient thing is that we would like to sweep such details under the carpet and walk on the carpet. In fact, I felt the same when I read Narayana Murthy’s comments on IISc some months back. I felt that the rebuttals to them have been weak and circumambulatory.

My worry is that as people we have lost focus!

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