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five years. It may be useful for such teachers to get a feedback from the students whom they teach, through an objective proforma to be filled by the students after the teaching session. This would enable the teachers to improve their performance. On this basis they could submit a yearly report of plans for the next academic year to the Head of the department for appraisal of a consultative committee. The department/university/college should subsidize the buying of books by the teachers to a limited extent it can afford, to encourage them. The practice of getting feedback from the students was started three decades ago in some of the departments of a university, but was given up because of certain difficulties. It is unfortunate that some teachers do not want to know about their weaknesses and shortcomings, which is so necessary for improvement of our institutions.

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Teamwork in science

The editorial in Current Science (2002, 82, 609–610) has raised very creditable ethical issues. Sharing credit within a team of scientists has not been fair as in any other professional activity. The quote by Max Perutz, ‘I had my reward in their lasting respect and affection and it did not damage my scientific career’ is very pertinent. The matter hinges critically on the transparency of personality and behaviour of the group leader. In the context of our country, the following considerations may help raise the ethical standards besides help encourage bright young students to opt for research in basic sciences, an issue that has already assumed serious proportions.

(a) Over-ambitious leaders have unduly boosted egos. As most scientific endeavours today require good teamwork, it may be wise to implement schemes of rewards/incentives for a team’s achievement in projects, rather than try awarding individuals. Such encouragement may be instituted right from the school stage in order to curtail harmful effects of individual egos that start building from the formative years.

(b) The administration of science and educational institutions needs to curb arbitrariness/adhocism in decision-making. Mandatory provisions to ensure such governance may have to be considered. The functioning has to become transparent to any scrutiny by a concerned individual and/or authoritative professional bodies.

(c) There is a lot of talk about achieving excellence in science in our country. It is necessary to note that freedom and expansiveness of the thought process only can result in excellence. It requires a high degree of self-discipline, self-critical capacity, humility and the ability to discriminate relevant material out of a sea of information available. One also needs to train to grasp inspirational ideas as and when these come and then give the same a practical shape, free from preconceived bias. There is thus a need to identify peers/experts who can rise above self-projection. Usually such persons are not easily visible during a casual search.

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Sterile intellectuals

Intellectuals, being the conscience keepers of the society, it is essential that they must express their opinion candidly with honesty to defend truth without any fear or favour to authority in power. Today, in India, we have a large pool of intellectuals. Unfortunately, only a microscopic minority have the courage to stand up to the authorities to speak their mind, even if the truth is harsh and bitter. Most others, however, prefer to be obedient, subservient and behave like chameleons, which is in sharp contrast to the expectations of the Nobel Laureate C. V. Raman who has said: ‘Even a man of sensitivity and imagination can become bound and unfree when he has to falsify his feelings. If he forces him to say that he likes what he dislikes and that he believes what he does not believe, then he will have to pay the price in that his spontaneous and his creative faculties will dry up.’

It is an irony that in the post-independence period, only mass production of such sterile intellectuals has been entertained. This is amply evident from the fact that even though we have celebrated the golden jubilee of our independence, we in India have not produced a single Nobel Laureate in the post-independence period. What is still more shocking is that the research papers with thousand citation counts are either rare or nonexistent, in spite of fabulous funding on national research institutes. Further, such deplorable decline of quality has also percolated to other fields of human activities like politics, administration, administration of justice which consume enormous amount of public time and money. As a result, the institutions that have produced them and the institutions that have sustained them are cracking under their weight and are heading towards redundancy. Since these sterile intellectuals have lost their ability to speak the truth, there is a strong decline, not only in the quality of education and research,