

Nevertheless,
science in the century
was to



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Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency. We could have done better, given the pool of talent and intelligence we started with at independence the first prime minister who understood and appreciated the role of science and was willing to support it wholeheartedly given the respect the science enjoyed amongst the bright young students of the time. But we didn't why? It is easy to pretend to be wise after the event.

But we realise that a wrong turning has been taken only after we go down the road some distance. So here are the answers to the 'Why'? The significant step takes around the time of independence to increase the ambience of science in the century was to set up autonomous research institutes (ARIS) in various research areas. The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) set up in 1996 set the tone. The TIFR initially sent scientist for training abroad. It also (TIFR) provided the intellectual material for the country's atomic energy programme.

The CSIR society also worked in the direction of self reliance by creating advance laboratories in different fields all over country. Today, we have a large network of ARIS created by the various scientific departments of the Government of India. It all looks good... but here are the questions: none of these ARIS has any integrated link with any university even if the university is in the same town. The purpose of all government effort for developing new science should be to provide a hassle free environment for dedicated research far from the madding crowds of a university dons and rowdy student masses.

By and large, students do not find a scientific career attractive because they know that if they opt for a bachelor of science stream, there is no excitement, no motivating teachers any more. Simultaneously, with the creation of ARIS the downgrading of our once excellent university systems also began. Take any old university of today and compare its academic and scholarly ambience with what it was 60-70 years ago. The difference is too obvious to comment. The universities have become factories where the workers' hours are counted by bureaucrats each time a pay revision takes place, when merit as a criteria for selection, goes out of the window we have no reasons or justification to demand that a university should produce quality output. If we were to learn from our past mistakes, the following change is necessary. First, there should be close interaction between universities and ARIS with the scientists from the former lecturing the students from the latter and the faculty and students from the latter being given opportunities for participating in frontier research at the former.

Second, Scholastic merit must be seen to reassert itself in the university evolution. And third our scientific institutions should depart from the pay structure which parallels that of administration and an evolution scheme which is not adventurous enough to recognize and encourage merit at a young age. For the evolution of a scientist is markedly different from that of a bureaucrat. In short, we have the talent, we see the goals, what is needed is a change of environment.