

Improving the quality of Ph D students in Indian universities

Gupta¹ has given some valuable suggestions for admission, monitoring and examination of Ph D candidates in Indian universities. It is a well-known fact that nobody fails in a Ph D examination and the results are 100%, irrespective of the quality of the research output.

In the Physics Department at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar we introduced some innovations during the 1980s for registration of Ph D candidates and some universities are following the same pattern now. A Ph D candidate must choose his own supervisor after interacting with the faculty members. He will be first enrolled as a Ph D student and only after he has proven his worth by publishing the results of his research work in some refereed journal, will he be registered for a Ph D degree. Before submission of thesis a candidate should

give a research seminar where the faculty members along with his supervisor will judge his work. If the candidate has produced four to five research publications in reputed journals, the condition of holding any written or oral examination should be waived. After all, what are we going to judge by submitting a Ph D thesis of 200 pages with literature survey and experimental techniques, if it is a mere repetition of the work already reported in literature. This procedure was followed in most of the universities in France when I wrote my doctoral thesis in 1972. A candidate was asked to submit three copies of his research publications with a brief introduction on the theme of his research project. The supervisor of the candidate also acted as one of the examiners and the viva-voce was open to public.

To check the rot, the University Grants Commission must prepare common guidelines for registration of Ph D candidates, a screening test for research supervisors and debar third-rate supervisors and universities from awarding Ph D degrees. Some American universities follow this practice to maintain the high standards of research. Even those who have not published a single paper in any refereed journal are guiding Ph D students in some Indian universities.

1. Gupta, Y. K., *Curr. Sci.*, 2002, **83**, 927–928.

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Digital database of plant diversity: Call for collaboration

Realizing the need for and the importance of documenting biological diversity of the country, we have embarked on the task of compiling a digital database on the plant diversity of India. As a part of the programme, we have been assembling the images of the specimens from various herbarium collections. As a first step, we are digitizing the specimens available at Center for Ecological Sciences and Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions, Bangalore. Indian plant specimens at Kew Botanical Gardens, UK, Harvard University and Missouri Botanical Gardens, USA are also being digitized.

We wish to extend our programme to include other herbarium collections main-

tained in different centers of the country. In this connection, we appreciate the centers having their own plant collections providing us the opportunity to digitize the images of the specimens with the following arrangements.

The images captured will be made available to the center along with the *Image Manager* program developed by us for this purpose.

Source credit for each image will be provided in the final database with details on the herbarium, collector and such other information.

We offer access to the herbarium images collected by us from other centers as well.

Finally, the images captured would be made available to the entire country through a website.

We welcome the participation by centers having plant specimens in this programme and for details you may contact: K. N. Ganeshaiah, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore 560 065; e-mail: kng@vsnl.com; Phone: 0091 (080) 3636276; Fax: 0091 (080) 353 0070.

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Nimesulide

Nimesulide, a simple nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), has been very much in the news recently and has figured in an insightful editorial of Balaran¹ and a balanced article of Kul-karni². Having been associated with its development in India, I wish to offer a few further remarks.

Nimesulide is chemically N-(4-nitro-2-phenoxyphenyl)methane sulphonamide

and belongs to the class of sulphonamides. These were synthesized by Riker Laboratories in USA and patented (US 3,856,859; 24 December 1974) as analgesics, antipyretics, herbicides, inflammation inhibitors and microbicides³. It was originally licensed to Helsinn Healthcare SA, a private company in Switzerland, for worldwide development and marketing. It was first introduced in

Portugal in 1985 by Labs Biopharma. The useful anti-inflammatory–analgesic properties of nimesulide appear to have attracted the attention of Boehringer Mannheim who probably licensed it from Helsinn and conducted advanced biological studies and large-scale clinical trials. The results were announced in a symposium, the proceedings of which were published⁴. These investigations con-