

## Report of the meeting on “Restoration of ethics in Science”

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*[Joint Action Committee of Unions and Associations of Autonomous Research Institutes, West Bengal, is a body, that was formed more than two decades back, to protect the rights and privileges of the scientists and scientific workers working in the autonomous research institutes. Mr. Chakraborty is an important office bearer of JACARI]*

Latin 'scientia', derived from Greek root, means knowledge through “observation, identification, description, experimental investigation and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena”. Traditionally over the eons, the scientists are considered to be a group of people who accept and declare only truth without any compromise. With the progress of civilization, the human society is also undergoing lots of social metamorphosis. Science is no longer a concept of “plain living and high thinking”, it may as well give a position of power in the society. As a result there is a considerable deterioration in ethics of science among the scientists in general. Many established managers of science, in order to retain their positions of control, often suppress the truth or even highlight false claims about their scientific achievements. Many budding scientists feel that a tall claim may further his/her interest that could elevate him or her in the position of importance. Public, in general, loves to enjoy the cheap stories of false discoveries, propagated by the media. They are reluctant to verify the truth behind such findings. A meeting was organized by JACARI, on 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2007, at Meghnad Saha Auditorium in the Rashbehari Prangan of the University College of Science and Technology of Kolkata. The topic of the meeting was to discuss on the “Restoration of ethics in science”. The meeting was presided by Prof. Ramen Kumar Poddar, former Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University. Other speakers were Prof. Manoj Kumar Pal (Former Director of Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, Kolkata), Dr. Mukul Sinha (Advocate in Gujarat High Court and a dedicated social activist) and Prof. Binayak Dutta-Roy (Well known physicist and the founder secretary of JACARI).

At the onset Prof. Poddar expressed his difference on the exact topic of the meeting. He opined that the word “restoration” might lead to a false impression that the previous generations of scientists had been very honest in comparison to the present generation. He stated how unethical practices in science were observed at all points of time in the history. He, of course, emphasized the need of making these conventions to create an awareness about the peril of such unethical practices.

Prof. Manoj Kumar Pal in his opening speech asked the audience to follow the eightfold way, the great teaching of Gautam Buddha. He reminded that the Noble Eightfold Path contains eight elements which may be subdivided into three major groups. These are:

A. Wisdom: Right view, right intention.

B. Ethical Conduct: Right speech, right action, right livelihood.

C. Mental Discipline: Right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration

Dr. Pal elaborated the modus operandi of scientific research in India. Scientific research organizations in India may be classified as follows:

1. Organizations under direct Government control
2. Organizations under control of Universities
3. Autonomous Research institutions
4. Private run research institutions

Prof. Pal though admitted that within the present ambit of autonomy a democratic environment in functioning of the Research Institute could be maintained. But he was very critical of the functioning of Autonomous Research Institutes. He criticized the Government for adopting a wrong policy of generation of electricity at the national level without taking into scientific prudence and judgment. He also explained in detail how the fund for nuclear research had been mis-utilized. Prof. Pal cited an example in unethical practice in science. Without naming, he said that a famous scientist of Kolkata in the recent years had claimed predictability of occurrence of earthquake from the observation of emission of gases in a hot spring. Such a claim without proper analysis of the data is a deliberate attempt of achieving cheap popularity.

Dr. Mukul Sinha emphasized the importance of scientists in understanding social phenomena. Dr. Sinha then gave an interesting account how scientific methodologies had been used in some recent social cases in establishing the truth against concocted information propagated by some interested people to mislead the public. Dr. Sinha showed how with the help of science, they were able to find the actual epicenter of earthquake in Gujarat. While some influential people, deliberately tried to mislead the Government in identifying the epicenter to enjoy the funds allocated for earthquake victims. Dr. Sinha also mentioned how his group could prove conclusively, by using knowledge of basic science, that the fire in the compartment in the Godhra incidence, was generated from within the compartment and could not come from outside.

Prof. Binayak Dutta-Roy was the last speaker in the meeting. He traced out a history of frauds in science and gave more emphasis on the frauds occurring in the recent times. He too very critically attacked the false claim of prediction of earthquakes by one renowned person in West Bengal. Prof. Dutta-Roy also criticized the claim of the same person that enough helium might be produced from the hot springs of Bakreswar. In fact making such a false claim he was able to be granted a project from central funding. He mentioned that in the recent times, news media has been highlighting about the making of an electronic chip in a research institute of West Bengal after a press conference by the institute Director. It was claimed that the said VLSI chip was designed indigenously and by selling that chip to foreign countries, Government of India made a hefty profit. Prof. Dutta-Roy showed that the chip was neither indigenous, nor profitable. In fact a huge Government money have been wasted in producing that chip. Prof. Dutta-Roy illustrated how in foreign countries such unethical acts in science is put under the scanner and the persons responsible for such an act are given punishment. He lamented why such things are not in practice in this country. The society for prevention of such acts in INSA is probably a nonfunctional unit.

A large number of persons from the audience took part in the discussion during interacting session. This included some eminent scientists like Prof. B.B. Biswas or Prof. Indrani Bose. In the end the following appeal was unanimously accepted by the house.

### The Appeal

On behalf of JACARI, it is our sincere appeal to conscientious scientists, technologists, scientific and technical workers and social activists to consider the following proposals and to launch a concerted movement against the Director-Bureaucrat nexus undermining the noble essence of autonomy.

1. Parliament should give a constitutional definition and frame a rule guiding Autonomous Bodies in the line of self Government.
2. A high power committee should be constituted to appoint Director of these Autonomous Research Institutes.
3. A vigilance cell inducting renowned personalities should be constituted to look after the integrity of the Director and to take necessary steps for any unethical acts of such persons.