During the recent visit of the Parliamentary Committee on Science and Technology to the Indian Academy of Sciences, the major issue of discussion was the social relevance of institutions such as the Academy. What indeed is the role in society of an institution, members of which consist exclusively of academicians who are elected on the basis of their contributions to their respective scientific disciplines? As the elected representatives of the citizens of this nation, the members of the Parliamentary Committee have the right to seek information about what the Academy has given in return to the society that supports its existence. As far as the Indian Academy of Sciences is concerned, one of its major contributions to society is in the field of science education that includes the publication of this journal. In an environment where general interest in basic sciences is dwindling, creating awareness about science is an important social and constitutional responsibility. This the Academy has carried out successfully for the past several years through the various activities of its Science Education Panel. The extremely popular short duration lecture programmes of the Academy help to convey the excitement of being involved in scientific research to the younger generation consisting of both students and teachers. The refresher courses for teachers is another important activity of the Education Panel that reaches out to college and university teachers to bring them up to date on recent developments in science. These are national level activities with representation from all parts of India. The major asset the Academy possesses that makes these efforts possible is its human resource consisting of over 800 Fellows who are experts in their chosen scientific disciplines. They travel to all parts of the country to participate actively in these programmes.

For me personally, the most rewarding aspect of participating as a resource person in these courses is the enthusiasm and joy with which the lectures and demonstrations are received by the stu-
Our motivated students and teachers are our assets. The future of Indian science will be bright if we can keep their creativity and enthusiasm alive.

How much of the enthusiasm of the younger generation can we sustain? Another very popular activity of the Academy is the Summer Fellowship Programme. This enables students from different parts of the country to experience first hand, the excitement of working in a research laboratory. However, this programme can support only a small fraction of the applicants. Throughout the year, there are requests from post-graduate students enrolled in biotechnology programmes in different universities to undertake scientific projects that form part of their curriculum, as stipulated by the Department of Biotechnology that approves many of these programmes. However, the applicants far outnumber the laboratories where they can be trained. It is indeed a very sad exercise to keep writing regret letters and send back bright students who approach with a request for a project. This will definitely have a negative impact on their enthusiasm. The only solution to this problem is to enable their universities to provide facilities so that students can carry out a small research project in their own university laboratories with the guidance of their teachers, which is the practice in several well-established university departments. Though it is desirable for students to travel and work in a different environment, the sheer magnitude of the numbers makes this unfeasible. Both the UGC and DBT should come forward to make this possible at the university level before approving such Masters level degree programmes.

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