

Editorial

G K Ananthasuresh, Associate Editor

Wisdom has many forms. A particularly impressive kind of wisdom is seen in Bharthrihari's Sanskrit poem:

बोद्धारो मत्सरग्रस्ताः प्रभवः स्मयदूषिताः ।
अबोधोपहताश्चान्ये जीर्णमंगे सुभाषितम् ॥



Email:
suresh@mecheng.iisc.ernet.in

This can be interpreted as “the learned are too jealous, the powerful ones too arrogant, and the others too ignorant to listen to good advice and hence it remains within”. Bharthrihari (ca. 5th century), who gave us *Nithi Shathakam* with loads of sage advice, was also wise enough to know that advice is not always palatable to all. Today, unsolicited advice is all around us: in self-help books, internet sites, television, e-mail, short message service (SMS), etc. Not many are inclined to take someone else's advice unless they are in a vulnerable mood. The younger generation is particularly loaded with advice from parents, teachers, and others. Which institution to attend, which coaching centre to enrol in, what books to read, how long one should study, and finally which career to pursue, are all dictated to them. Many heed the advice willingly or reluctantly.

Some of those who choose a career path that does not align either with their passion or talent may pursue their heart's desire as a hobby. If they are good at it, they become amateur specialists or even professionals in that field. C V Raman and Albert Einstein are the best examples of this kind. It appears that there were many more accomplished amateurs in the past than now. The article by A K Mallik drives home this point. Amateur scientists are becoming extinct perhaps due to strict rules, excessive professionalism, and undue emphasis on earning degrees. Research today, some might say, is possible with expensive equipment and extensive learning in a field. If so, it is beyond the reach of those who want to pursue it only as an avocation. But it is encouraging to note in the article by M M Deshmukh and V Singh that scotch-tape and pencil lead played a role in research that won the 2010 Physics Nobel. Simple ideas can lead to big things. Untethered mind flies to greater heights. Freedom to pursue one's curiosity makes people blossom freely. What if modern society is conducive for everyone to take up what they truly enjoy? What if the young generation is allowed to choose a career based on talent and interest and not market trends? It may do greater good to society at large. Creativity may flourish more. A definite outcome would be that all would go about their work with greater joy and pride. Even in that happy situation, Bharthrihari's cautionary advice should not go unheeded.

