

CORRESPONDENCE

As Others See Us: The Gupta Affair

[We have voiced our anguish at the recent happenings at the Panjab University, specially the reinstatement of V. J. Gupta as a professor without enquiry into the grave charges of scientific fraud levelled against him (see Editorial in Jour. Geol. Soc. India, v. 39 (3), p. 190). The action of the Panjab University has invited derisive comments from 'Nature'. The paper has dubbed the action of the University as, 'Indian rope trick' (Nature, v. 355, 20 February 1992, p. 660). We reproduce below a letter recently received from a palaeontologist from Australia giving his reaction to the news of reinstatement of Gupta as professor, as another evidence of the type of image we are projecting to the outside world through our inaction on this sordid affair.—Ed.]

Australian Museum
Division of Earth Sciences

19th February 1992

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you on a matter that gravely threatens the integrity and international reputation of Indian science.

News has just reached us that Professor V. J. Gupta of Panjab University, Chandigarh has just been reinstated to the position from which he was suspended last year pending an inquiry into the most serious charges in science – deliberate scientific fraud and plagiarism. These charges, made by a group of leading Indian and international geologists and palaeontologists, have not, to the best of my knowledge been satisfactorily answered or refuted.

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The accusations against Gupta are detailed and very specific. They are also relatively easy to check for accuracy. Dr. Gupta's activities over 25 years have involved over 100 co-authors, about half of whom were non-Indian, almost all of whom now appear to be innocent victims of massive long-term scientific fraud.

I wish to make it clear that I have *not* personally been involved professionally with Professor Gupta, unlike two of my close colleagues, Dr. Philippe Janvier in Paris and Dr. Susan Turner in Brisbane, Australia. Both of them accepted, in good faith, Professor Gupta's invitation to co-author scientific papers on fossils supposedly discovered in the Himalayas – a decision they now bitterly regret. However, it could just as easily have been me. I work on similar types on fossils and would probably have accepted such an invitation from a leading Indian 'scientist'.

I have read most of the literature on this controversy – both the detailed accusations levelled against Professor Gupta and Professor Gupta's published

replies. If only a small proportion of the accusations are correct Dr. Gupta should be expelled from the scientific and educational community immediately and permanently before he can do any more damage to Indian science and education and its reputation throughout the world.

The accusations against Professor Gupta include the very serious charges that both his Ph.D. thesis and his D.Sc. thesis (the basis for his personal chair at the University) contain abundant evidence of plagiarised text and illustrations. These charges should be easy to confirm or refute because copies of both of Gupta's theses are presumably lodged in the University library. If examination of Gupta's theses confirm the charges no innocent co-author can be blamed for such inclusions. It would appear that Gupta's scientific career has been based on fraud and deception right from the beginning – and has gone on unchecked ever since.

The detailed charges against Gupta have been widely documented and publicised in Indian and international scientific journals. They are common knowledge amongst the international scientific community. Gupta has had ample opportunity to refute the charges. To date he has failed to do so.

It is not the responsibility of scientists *outside* India to clear up the Gupta mess; we can only help to check and document the charges and provide moral support for those brave scientists inside India who have laid their careers and reputations on the line by exposing what is undoubtedly an international scandal.

This regrettable situation can only be resolved by appropriate authorities *inside* India. It is high time that your State and Federal Governments in association with your leading scientific and academic bodies and communities took a good hard look at this situation and launched a detailed, independent investigation into the charges against Gupta.

The recent reinstatement of V. J. Gupta, without a satisfactory explanation of the serious charges against him, sends an unmistakable (but very unfortunate) message to the international scientific community—that Indian science, at least in the field of palaeontology and stratigraphy, operates by rules quite different from the rest of the International scientific community.

If V. J. Gupta is restored to, and confirmed in, his position of power and influence in Indian palaeontology, I and my colleagues will have no choice but to treat with extreme suspicion *all* requests for scientific cooperation and assistance coming from India. This will affect, for example, requests from Indian students seeking research support of fellowship positions overseas. It is unfortunate that innocent Indian students will be harmed but that is an inevitable legacy of the Gupta affair, which has ramifications far beyond the field of palaeontology. International scientific cooperation operates largely on trust and scientific integrity. Once that trust is destroyed it will take a long time to repair.

Yours sincerely
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Palaeontologist