

## NOTES

### AS OTHERS SEE US "THE GUPTA AFFAIR" - (2)

*(The following is an extract from News and Comments which has appeared in 'Geology Today' Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 10 (1992) having reference to the Gupta Affair. Thanks to the continued inaction by the concerned authorities, the matter rests where it was three years ago—Ed.).*

We have discussed the allegations of palaeontological fraud in India several times, using as source material papers, letters and commentaries published in the west\*. What we have not done hitherto is report on what has been said in the Indian geological press. There is a reason for this. We knew by July 1990 that material of interest had been published in the June 1990 issue of the *Journal Geological Society of India (JGSI)*, and right away we requested that issue and an earlier one (December 1989) from the National Lending Library.

(But back to the main issue) The Indian Scientific Establishment in general and the Officers of Panjab University (Chandigarh) in particular have been rightly criticized for dragging their feet over the Gupta affair, a tactic that has badly backfired, merely serving to extend the debate and hence keep the affair in public eye much longer than need be. It's worth placing on record, however, that not all branches of the Indian scientific establishment have been so relaxed about the matter. B. P. Radhakrishna, the editor of the *JGSI*, took a tough line right from the start, urging rapid action and having the courage to take the argument right into the heartland of Indian geological literature. Thus in December 1989 and June 1990, respectively, he published two long articles by John A. Talent (Gupta's chief accuser) and his colleagues, documenting in some detail Gupta's crimes against science: introducing foreign fossils into the Himalayas, recycling specimens (i.e., reporting the same specimens as having come from more than one locality), recycling plates from others' publications, falsely claiming confirmation of fossil identifications by leading authorities, making other scientists co-authors of papers without permission, giving misleading field 'data' from 'phantom' locations, and so on.

'Our denial of an opportunity to publish the accusations,' said Radhakrishna ('Indian palaeontology under a cloud', *JGSI*, v. 34, p. 561, 1989), 'could be construed as acquiescence in the alleged fraud', although 'Normally our practice has been to stay clear of controversial issues and confine ourselves to the main task of highlighting important items of research.' But any suspicion that the publication of Talent's criticisms was merely a ploy to avoid a charge of lack of concern is immediately dispelled by Radhakrishna's outspoken views on Gupta's post-accusation behaviour, namely, 'The extremely poor defence he has put in, [and] the evasive way in which he has skirted round the main issues, and failed to provide clear answers to the specific charges levelled against him.'

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\* *Geology Today*, v. 5, p. 152; v. 5, p.191; v. 6, p. 5; v. 6, p. 80; v. 6, p. 175; v. 7, p. 79.

No past collaborator of Gupta, Indian or Foreign, had 'come forward with their own critical assessment of the work of Gupta' ('Their silence amounting to indifference is disconcerting') and Panjab University had carried out no proper investigation. In the meantime, 'It should not have been difficult for Gupta to produce the originals of the recycled fossils with their registration numbers, dates of collection, field descriptions, . . . to prove that his finds were genuine and not recycled as alleged. He has failed to do so, in spite of ample opportunities given. What is annoying is his way of confusing issues, so that neither himself nor any one else can make head or tail of what he is talking about.' Plain words indeed.

Radhakrishna's overriding concern is that the whole affair has put Indian palaeontology under a cloud or even 'under fire', as indeed it has. But there are distinctions to be made here. It is not true to say that Gupta's crimes have put the *practice* of Indian Science as a whole under a cloud. By and large, Earth scientists are intelligent enough to appreciate that one crook doesn't implicate a whole community. It *is* true that Gupta has put some of the *content* of Indian palaeontology under a cloud, but that can be rectified—with some effort, admittedly—by identifying the false data and expunging it from the record. What *has* put Indian palaeontology under a cloud, however, is the failure of Panjab University and the Indian geoscience community in general to deal with the Gupta affair quickly and firmly. That's the real scandal. Three years after the accusations were first made, the matter drags on, largely because of a moral failure of Panjab University in particular to act.

### SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS

"In calling for a logical approach to the problems of Geology, scientists should bear in mind that the momentous advances in other disciplines were the result of alternations between diligent collection of data by normal science, mathematical analysis of data and the great non-rational leaps called scientific revolutions."

— J. TUJO WILSON

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### CREATION OF NEW NAMES

"There is undoubtedly an attraction in the creation of new names . . . (but) . . . brevity of expression is by no means an unmixed blessing, and the one word may require a whole paragraph of explanation".

— ARTHUR HOLMES

(*Nomenclature of Petrology*, 1920)