

EDITORIAL

Societal Responsibilities and Research Publications

In the wake of renaissance of scientific experimentation in 17th and 18th century Europe, and consequent better understanding of the diverse natural phenomena and emergence of new concepts, need was felt to have organized forums where scientists and other scholars could discuss their new findings and concepts. This led to the establishment of many Societies and Academies, which provided formal and regular platforms for scientists and scholars to present their results for peers to examine and discuss. These discussions were followed by publication of the findings and their interpretations either in the form of “Proceedings” of the given Academy/Society or as independent books. This system of “peer-discussion” and publication as proceedings of the given meeting obviously provided a recognition mark to the researcher/discoverer and soon became the most common model for dissemination of scientific discoveries. The British introduced this system in India as well and accordingly, Science Academies and other learned societies were established in the country. However, as the numbers of researchers in different fields escalated with time, it was no longer possible to have a formal presentation of every research paper before its publication and consequently, the research publication paradigm also began to change in the last century. Many commercial journals appeared on the scene and very quickly, the earlier “peer-discussion” model got replaced by a “peer-review” system before publication. In current times, many journals, like this one, continue to include “Proceedings” in their name, although very few or none of the papers published in their pages may have been formally presented during a meeting of the given learned Society/Academy.

With increasing competition for space, notwithstanding the ever-increasing numbers of journals becoming available, a variety of pre-filters have found their place in the process of publication

of a manuscript in the so-called “high impact” journals. Ironically, the “process of acceptance” has actually turned into a “process of rejection”! The widely discussed and much maligned, but still widely used, “impact factor” bug and similar other parameters, that ostensibly quantify the quality of a research paper, also have their origins largely in commercial interests of the big corporate players in the research journal publication industry. As Arunachalam *et al.* discuss in this issue, the prevailing “Heads I win, tails you lose” situation has become a nightmare not only for libraries and readers but also for authors who wish to publish their findings. Increasingly shrinking number of journals now publish a paper without “page”, “colour” or “processing” or “open access” charges. Many journals also strongly suggest or even insist upon “language editing” for a fee. In “good old days”, authors used to get complimentary hard copy reprints and a copy of the journal issue, but in recent times, the author has to pay for publishing his/her results to ensure that someone else earns. Paradoxically, the reviewers and editors who are expected to do their job seriously so that quality is ensured, also remain “honorary”.

In the face of such wide-spread commercialization of research publication, we need to ask if the learned Societies and Academies should take a responsibility to provide a convenient forum for the researchers who, after hard and painstaking efforts, wish to share their new-found knowledge with others. I believe that the academic Societies and Academies need to take this responsibility and to once again reclaim their prime position in dissemination of new research findings rather than take a back-seat in the prevailing commercial competition. Being essentially not-for-profit organizations, the academic Societies and Academies, who usually have governmental and/or other public support through their own corpus/

membership fees/endowments etc, should not fall prey to the attraction of deriving hefty earnings through journal publication. However, the bigger challenge facing such academic journals is to maintain good quality of their content. General perception that something which is free or is priced cheap is worthless or of poor quality, imprisons the academic journals in perpetually low ranking status because, as discussed earlier in these columns and elsewhere, their editors are limited by the quality of manuscripts submitted by authors. It is high time that authors, in their own long-term interest, submit good quality manuscripts to academic journals which do not charge for publishing so that these journals too become author-friendly, visible and, therefore, popular. Of course, besides providing a free platform to authors to publish their results, the academic journal also needs to ensure quality, quick and transparent peer review followed by good quality and timely publication, and open access to readers.

The *Proceedings of the Indian National Science Academy* is striving to provide all these services to authors. As was stated in the Editorial in March 2014 issue of the *Proceedings*, varieties of sections are now available in this journal for authors to contribute. The peer-review time and the interval between acceptance and publication are becoming shorter, thanks to cooperating reviewers, copy-editors and editorial

staff. We are hoping to start the online submission and peer-review system early next year to add to the convenience of all concerned. A new Editorial Board with expanded set of Editors and members will take charge in 2015 to cater to the needs of very diverse disciplines covered by this journal. The Editorial Board, comprising of active scientists, and thus also familiar with the author's point of view, is expected to work to facilitate acceptance rather than find means to reject a submission. All published papers now have DOI numbers to improve their visibility. And ofcourse, this journal provides full open access to everyone without requiring researchers or readers to access their funds!

We wish an exciting 2015 to all our readers, authors, reviewers, members of the Editorial family and all those associated with this journal.

Reference

- Arunachalam S, Ramamoorthi P and Gunasekaran S (2014) Heads I win, tails you lose: the intransigence of STM publishers
Proc Ind Natn Sci Acad **80**: 919-929.

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