

Publishing wars

The editorial on publishing wars is a timely reminder to Indian scientific institutions and scientists to revamp their approach in science publication. No doubt there has been a spurt of activity due to the electronic revolution, but in the information explosion we may lose real knowledge. Since science should focus on free dissemination of new knowledge, the recently acquired role of science publishers is highly skeptical. As Balaram¹ has rightly remarked, the turmoil in the world of science publishing needs to be negated through rational use of human intellect. Albeit the role of libraries is to cater to the needs of public, the trend to restrict access through institutional electronic means may not be justified. Public resources should be utilized to meet demands of maximum number. Research grants should be utilized to strengthen infrastructure and train people instead of paying outside profit-making agencies. The state should draw a policy to minimize wasteful expenditure and scientists

who generate useful data should be offered more incentives. Limiting data access through agencies may not be feasible in advancing concerns of the scientific community. Needs of organizations/scientists differ according to his/her/their area of interest. In the best spirit of Indian science, scope of journals should be widened to bring them to acceptable international standards². Periodicity, quality of contents, user utility and monetary aspects may be provided enough thrust to revitalize our limping journals³. One way is to integrate public libraries with publication cells and encourage publication of multidisciplinary journals, thus increasing the scope of circulation. Realistic cost structure, non-recovery of page charges, colour production charges, minimizing reprint charges, etc. may help in confidence building in our own Indian journals. Self-reliance in science popularization and science publication go a long way in the growth of any organization. The time has come when scientific institutes should be building their

own publication infrastructure, thus becoming responsible for publication, marketing and circulation to more users. High quality and meaningful contents would save our research institutions from private scientific sympathizers making profit. The concept of making public resource (public literature) available to users through free online usage may bring scientists together, thwarting profit-making agencies. Open access revolution is still a far cry as long as science practitioners fall prey to conditional design of publication industries.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**, 1249–1250.
2. Karandikar, R. L. and Sunder, V. S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**, 235.
3. Pichappan, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2003, **85**, 423–424.

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Quality of science journals

A lot has been said and written about the not-so-good general academic level of science research in the country. Poor quality of published papers in scientific journals is said to be one of the reasons for this, and this in turn is due to the indifference and negative attitude of competent workers who submit research papers to reputed foreign journals and not to Indian journals for publication. Occasional appeals have been made through correspondence to competent workers to contribute part of their research work to Indian journals too, but it seems it has been without any effect. Such appeals are not effective unless made on a one-to-one basis and one wonders whether this has been done by the senior and in-position scientists. The effective way for them to impress upon the junior competent workers to do this would have been by their (senior workers') own example. Left to themselves the competent workers do not contribute to Indian journals because (a) they do not wish to miss an opportunity to learn the finer points of the subject

through the detailed and positive comments of the reviewers of foreign journals, (b) they do not wish to miss a single opportunity to be recognized internationally by their work, (c) Indian scientists themselves do not recognize a good publication in Indian journals, even though the quality of the paper may be comparable to that in any reputed foreign journals. The competent worker, senior or junior, does not seem to realize that by his contribution to the Indian journals, he is in fact helping himself. The UGC, CSIR, universities and/or institutions can possibly do something by taking drastic steps to compel competent workers to do minimum service to the journals.

One suggestion is that the universities, national laboratories, etc. and UGC, CSIR and other funding agencies, may not make an appointment/promotion or entertain a research proposal for award of funds, unless the candidate has published at least one out of say five research papers in Indian journals. The quality of journals would gradually improve by this step. In

due course, this condition may become superficial or irrelevant.

In addition to the above, CSIR may provide funds to one/two journals in each discipline to make awards to the best papers in chosen five/six (or even ten) areas. Best papers in each area may be awarded a prize of Rs 5000 each. If CSIR spends about ten lakh rupees every year for ten different disciplines in science, the scheme will induce some of the good workers to submit some of their research papers to Indian journals in the hope of getting the award. Once good papers start getting published in Indian journals, there would be no dearth of competent reviewers too. It is an experiment worth putting to trial.

If both the steps are taken, one may see positive results within five years and the quality of the journals will improve.

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