

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

QUALITY RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN INSIGHT IN THE CULTURE OF PUBLISH OR PERISH

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**Prof. Kshitij Naikade, Dr. Manika Kamthan: Quality Research In Higher Education: An
Insight In The Culture Of Publish Or Perish -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of
Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x**

Keywords: teaching, research, API, UGC, publish, perish, Peer Review

ABSTRACT

There is no strait jacket formula to ascertain the credibility of an academician. More so, now when a life of a professor is not limited to going to classes and teaching. However, The Indian government has changed the life cycle of a professor forever. The government norms have shifted the focus on publishing in indexed journals and is regularly churning out new guidelines to ensure quality research by professors. The journals are also classified and publishing only in credible journals is encouraged by the government as well as by the educational institutions. We question this shift and examine the role of a professor as a teacher and a researcher. Although, they are two sides of a same coin, it should be the choice of professors about which side they want to focus on. We critically examine the “publish or perish” theory adopted by the Indian academia and also highlight the grey areas surrounding the same. This paper seeks to throw light on the changing parameters of academic scholarship and question their justifiability with the help of comparisons with other countries. The researchers analyses this never-ending dilemma which academicians in India go through

1. Introduction

In the last decade, there has been an unending pursuit amongst academicians to prove their academic worth by publishing research papers, essays, case studies

etc. in indexed journals showcasing research potential and helping their prospects for career and professional growth. Initially, it was launched and promoted as a harmless exercise by the accreditation agencies and the UGC (University Grants Commission). However, over the last few years it has emerged as the only standard to judge an academician's professionals worth and value to an academic institute, thus raising alarm bells amongst one and all. This unhealthy rat race has led to an unnecessary emphasis on numbers rather than the quality of research done.(Cheek, J. and Garnham, B. and Quan, J., et al., 2006) Academicians in educational institutes, irrespective of the stream or specialization are expected to procure proof of research done in the academic semester in the form of research publications in journals which are either indexed in Scopus or web of science or other such approved lists. On deeper analysis, the emphasis has shifted from qualitative research and is more on quantitative data driven publications which apparently adds to the authenticity of the research, irrespective of the fact whether the variables are verifiable or not. This toxic practice is bound to have negative repercussions on the mindset of academicians who are made to procure research publications as if they are corporate targets given by multinational corporations. (Cooper et al., 2015) This has also led to mushrooming of Journals and publication houses which put a very high premium on getting published in their journals. We can find several examples of conferences charging heavy fees for registration with promise of Scopus publication, thus identifying the weak point of researcher community in India. Earlier getting a Doctorate in your discipline of choice was looked at as the primary benchmark, however, now with the rising competition; a doctorate degree is deemed insufficient and has to be complimented by research papers(Palshikar, 2010)

2. Teaching vis a vis research

It is very important to understand, at the offset that teaching and research are two different sides and require different skill sets. The emphasis on mandatory publication of research is a serious problem, where there is an underlying assumption that good research aids good teaching (Jenkins, 2004). The authors would like to differ on this regard. A good teacher is the one who is clear with the concepts, theories and basic knowledge of his academic discipline and is successful in imparting the same to their students who are young impressionable minds. (Krishnaraj, 2011) This knowledge can come after reading lot of academic literature, real life work experience, industry experiences or by being a firsthand witness to the subject at hand. Translating bookish knowledge through lectures or through audio visual mediums require different communication and human relations skill set. It requires a deep understanding of human emotions, psyche and the knack of reaching out to your audience, in this case, your students in the language in which they understand.

There is also a lot of collateral damage which comes with this expectation of research publications. When universities put a huge onus on publications, non-

research activities suffer as collateral. Academics is primarily a teaching-based activity where there is a sense of community service. Historically, teaching is referred to as a Noble profession on the lines of the armed forces, whose primary objective is service. The primary emphasis that research will help an academician be a better teacher is an unfounded argument (Frost and Taylor, 1996) Universities are supposed to create pool of specialized knowledge, unlike the primary and higher school, where the expectations is to generate basic understanding. This passing down of knowledge in universities happens through teaching. Thus, this belief in Indian academia, that Teaching and Research are two sides of the same coin and are complimentary to each other is a rather unfounded expectation. (Brennan, 1994) Rather, the recent trend is, to hire professors who are good in research and who are expected to churn out research papers while they hire another group of professors who might not necessarily be an active researcher, but are expected to do administrative work, community engagement work and student related activities.

A good researcher is the one who can understand and analyze the issues happening in his discipline and try to formulate implementable solutions or experiments for the same. It requires one to pore over existing literature, segregate it, analyze it, read between the lines and interpret it to give your own original contribution through research papers or presentations or scientific experiments. Although it is advisable that one should be good at both as it is a reflection of the multifaceted and all-round nature of your academic excellence, it should not be the sole parameter for an academician to be judged. It is extremely plausible that a good Professor at a University can be a good communicator and has supreme grasp on his subject, but yet is not a very confident researcher and fails to blend the doctrinal and the empirical with his academic learnings.

The biggest victim of this incessant insistence on publishing research papers is the premature death of creativity and free thinking. Academicians are not thinking of building something which will benefit the society or help in resolving some societal complications or untangling some theoretical propositions, but are constantly in a lookout for a topic or a research area which can get them quick publication. The first thing any upcoming academician does these days and which is advised by peers is to analyze the kind of qualitative and quantitative articles being published in an unpaid reputed journal which doesn't take money for publishing and which has a good impact factor and then decides to align his research in accordance with the ideological and academic inclinations of the reputed journal. This is detrimental to how the Socratic thinking has evolved over the centuries. It is amusing to think that how the philosopher kings of the erstwhile era would have reacted at this thought of penning articles for publication purposes and then modifying them as per the formatting requirement of the editorial board with the required footnoting and referencing format.(Turner, 1981) The primary function of a teacher is "teaching" which can be co-related to research by way of keeping your lectures updated but forcing for such research to be published is uncalled for. Zahorik

(1973) emphasized on freedom to be given to teachers for developing and employing teaching techniques. In an empirical study among teachers he concluded that employing many guidelines will not yield “good teaching”.

Cain (2001) identified 10 qualities of a good teacher as follows:

Renewed teachers have a philosophical or spiritual center.

Renewed teachers have a commitment to students, to lifelong learning, and to the school.

Renewed teachers are aware that they are an integral part of the school.

Renewed teachers have a sense of personal responsibility.

Renewed teachers have a strong love for all aspects of life.

Renewed teachers have the ability to see all people as individuals

Renewed teachers have the ability to communicate.

Renewed teachers exhibit a sense of collegiality.

Renewed teachers have a strongly developed sense of leadership.

Renewed teachers separate their egos from their work.

In the above given 10 points, we don't see the requisite of teacher also being a researcher. There can be teachers who are dedicated researchers but are not publishing (Lofthouse, 1974). Although it can be argued that a teacher is supposed to be engaged in lifelong learning process, there are no evidences to prove that all good teachers are good researchers also (Jenkins A. and Blackman, T. and Lindsay, R. and Paton-Saltzberg, R, 1998). Elton (1986) argues that the relationship between teaching and research is open to experiments and justifications but it can be concluded that teaching and research should mutually exist in an institution for the benefit of both. It can be understood that the performance of an institution or department is based on the combined performance in research and teaching. (Bliss, T. and Fahrney, C. and Steffy, B., 1996). The research profile builds the public image of the institution as it is showcased to the entire world while teaching is confined only to a limited audience and thus we find lesser stress on quality of teaching today. Moreover, it is seen that acclaimed researchers don't prove to be good supervisors as they pay less attention to the research of their students and are engrossed in their personal research agendas (Crosling, G. and Nair, M. and Vaithilingam, S, 2015)

3. Publish or Perish vis a vis Government Guidelines:

In 2010, University Grants Commission (UGC), the premiere institute in India responsible for maintaining quality in higher education together with All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE) introduced the academic performance indicators (API) for the purpose of evaluating the performance of teachers in higher education institutions. The indicators were mainly to encourage teachers to concentrate on research simultaneously with teaching (Chakravarthy,2010) The appointment as well as career advancement was based on these academic indicators. As a reaction to severe criticism by the academic fraternity, UGC repealed it in 2013 but again reinforced within months. (Pushkar, 2016). The indicators range from Ph.D. to publications to

research projects to attendance in refresher or faculty development programs. It gives four points for each academic activity and the score decides your fate in appointment as well as career advancement. Although, the notification clearly mentions that the guideline only to government funded educational institutions, the private universities voluntarily chose to apply the same parameters for their selection and appraisal processes. (UGC, 2010)

API faced severe criticism from the academia. It should be highlighted here that the teachers who were appointed before 2010, never signed up for it, especially in undergraduate courses, where teaching should ideally be paramount. Moreover, teachers are already overburdened with administrative work, large number of students to teach and hence it is not justified to expect them to contribute to country's research profile (Pushkar, 2016).

In 2019, UGC took cognizance of the predatory journal business and came up with the UGC Care List. To quote UGC, "increased incidence of compromised publication ethics and deteriorating academic integrity is a growing problem contaminating all domains of research. It has been observed that unethical/deceptive practices in publishing are leading to an increased number of dubious/predatory journals worldwide. It has been reported that in India the percentage of research articles published in predatory journals is high. Unethical practices leading to "pay and publish trash" culture needs to be thwarted immediately." (Jain, 2019) To restore academic integrity, UGC has established Consortium of Academic and Research Ethics (CARE) to identify, monitor and maintain UGC-CARE Reference List of Quality Journals. This list is known as UGC CARE List. The list is also hierarchical and rates the journals in three kinds, List I, II and UGC CARE Listed. List I & II comprises of SCOPUS and Web of Science journals. Recently, many journals were removed from the third list. Many old and established journals like Indian Journal of Public Administration published by Sage publications does not find mention in any of the list. UGC has also prohibited self-plagiarism in this recent notification. The notification states "Reproduction, in part or whole, of one's own previously published work without adequate citation and proper acknowledgment and claiming the most recent work as new and original for any academic advantage amounts to 'text-recycling' (also known as 'self-plagiarism') and is not acceptable." (Jain, 2020).

It should be understood that government has completely missed to acknowledge the link between rise in predatory journals, self-plagiarism and other corrupt academic practices to its unrealistic demand of every teacher becoming a world class researcher to prove one's own worth.

Although, no evident relationship can be established between research and teaching, the API system was still adopted by UGC to uplift the research profile of the country. It is reported that the research criterion will be made more flexible by scrapping the provision that made it mandatory for a teacher to contribute to research in the following manner: Publishing papers in journals (55% weightage); research projects (20%); attending conferences and seminars (15%); and guiding PhD and undergraduate dissertations (10%). Although the

pros and cons of such a system are still to be debated, atleast now, a teacher can focus on any one or more of the above in a manner that she finds suitable for herself in the context of her discipline and other factors. However, in the same notification UGC also came up with the notification to make publication of two articles in recognised journals as a mandatory pre requisite for submission of Ph.D. thesis.

Just a cursory glance at the list of Scopus indexed journals will tell you that the number of journals based in India or publishing issues related to the Indian context is woefully short and limited. (Patwardhan et al., 2018) An even more in-depth analysis will tell you that most journals receive thousands of applications every month and therefore find it difficult to even segregate and acknowledge the authors. Segregating the papers theme wise, sending it for blind peer review while still maintaining the standard and quality is a task which very few journals are able to pull off consistently. This creates a fertile ground for mushrooming of opportunistic journals who use predatory techniques in the name of operational costs to publish papers. (Demir, 2018) The journals too are pressurized to maintain their rankings and hence focus on Impact factor, citation scores and other such parameters which are too complicated to understand even for the most seasoned researcher. All journals are in the race to publish “ground breaking” research which will garner media and public attention and boost their academic image. In all this, the biggest victim is the honest researcher who feels peer pressurized to not just do research, but also do it quickly and within the parameters of the publication industry. (Seethapathy, G.S. and Kumar, J.S. and Hareesha, A.S., 2016) Scopus, one of the world’s largest database of citations trusted and legitimized in India by the UGC, too has a number of journals, having steep publication and processing fees. (Björk and Solomon, 2015)

The API system gave rise to substandard Ph.D. theses, low quality journals; paid publications, open access charges, per page publication charges, article processing fees etc. (Pushkar, 2016). Lakhotia (2015) links the API and several other UGC notifications to the rise of predatory journals, organization of “bogus” conferences and workshops and make India a leading location for such deplorable activities. He says that it leads to “academic pollution” rather than promoting academic performance. API has clearly chosen “quantity over quality” and research is reduced to complicated arithmetic of impact factor and cite score. Young researchers or academicians are easy prey for predatory journals as they suffer from extreme professional insecurity as well as confidence.

Lakhotia (2017) again highlighted the fraud of “open access publication”. He argues that publication houses are no more headed by academic persons and are operating as “commercial houses” and are dealing with the publication of research as a business activity and are motivated to make most profits. He revisits the earlier times when journals used to attract good researchers by giving free issues and charged modest charges for coloured printing. With greater access to internet, hard copies of publications saw a downfall, and the

idea of “open access” to published scholarly work gained momentum and significance. This was seen as contributing to greater citations of the published work and attract researchers. This model led to the authors or institutions paying from their own pockets for uplifting their research profile. The commercial houses encashed this model and “open access publication charges” got established as a legitimate practice in the research publication market. The golden days where authors were rewarded with free copies of journals are over and authors succumb to the urge to be cited, which is obviously not guaranteed, and pay heavy publication charges. Pinfield (2010) says that “open access publication charges” works against the authors from developing world who cannot afford to pay heavy charges and there is no level playing field. He suggests that “publish for free and pay to read” over the “pay to publish and read for free” model is a better model to be followed by the publication houses.

4. The Politics of University Rankings:

It needs to be investigated that why the Government is pushing this agenda of “publish or perish” with never seen before energy. The answer can be found in the quest of Indian educational institutions to compete in the world university rankings. This is again rooted in promoting India as an education destination. There are various world rankings but QS rankings and Times Higher Education (THE) are most widely recognised and quoted (Jalote, 2019). There is no Indian university in top 200 universities in the THE 2019 rankings. The Indian institutions feature only in 301-350 bracket.

Just a cursory comparative glance at the Universities in the top 200 in the QS rankings will make it clear that there are 7 universities from China in the top 200, 9 Universities from a small country like Netherlands and 12 universities from Germany. Compared to that, India has only 3 Universities in the top 200, all three of them catering to hardcore sciences and none dedicated to Social Science research. This statistic is starker if you consider the fact that India has a staggering 945 registered Universities comprising of State, Central, Deemed and Private Universities. However, one must admit to the fact that most Chinese, Dutch and German universities featuring in the top 200 are universities whose origin is hundreds of years ago, which allowed them settle down into the academic rigor required for excellence. Compared to that all the Three Indian Universities are relatively new with their establishments coming after Independence or in the case of IISc Bangalore, at the turn of the 20th century. However, if the blueprint of the universities in the above given countries is analysed, it is clear that they have prioritized good hardcore research in relevant disciplines for centuries together and not put their academicians in the line of this publish or perish culture. That has resulted in these universities engaging in ground breaking research activities for decades together without overemphasising sheer numbers.

| | CHINA | |
|---|--------------------|---|
| 1 | 16 | Tsinghua University |
| 2 | 22 | Peking University |
| 3 | 40 | Fudan University |
| 4 | 54 | Zhejiang University |
| 5 | 60 | Shanghai Jiao Tong University |
| 6 | 89 | University of Science and Technology of China |
| 7 | 120 | Nanjing University |
| | | |
| | NETHERLANDS | |
| 1 | 50 | Delft University of Technology |
| 2 | 64 | University of Amsterdam |
| 3 | 102 | Eindhoven University of Technology |
| 4 | 114 | University of Groningen |
| 5 | 118 | University of Leiden |
| 6 | 120 | Utrecht University |
| 7 | 125 | Wageningen University & Research Center |
| 8 | 183 | Erasmus University Rotterdam |
| 9 | 186 | University of Twente |
| | | |
| | GERMANY | |
| 1 | 55 | Technical University of München |
| 2 | 63 | University of München |
| 3 | 66 | University of Heidelberg |
| 4 | 120 | Humboldt University of Berlin |
| 5 | 124 | Karlsruhe Institute of Technology |
| 6 | 130 | Free University of Berlin |

| | | |
|----|--------------|--|
| 7 | 138 | RWTH Aachen University |
| 8 | 147 | Technical University of Berlin |
| 9 | 169 | University of Freiburg |
| 10 | 169 | University of Tübingen |
| 11 | 179 | Technical University of Dresden |
| 12 | 197 | University of Göttingen |
| | | |
| | INDIA | |
| 1 | 152 | Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay |
| 2 | 182 | Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi |
| 3 | 184 | Indian Institute of Science |

Fig. 1: QS World Rankings 2020

It is imperative to understand the mechanism of university rankings. America started with the ranking system so as to cater to the commercialisation of higher education and providing criteria's to students to choose from many institutions on the basis of the rankings. Colleges and institutions themselves wanted a way to benchmark against peer institutions. Rankings are also utilized by the government and academic decision makers to make choices about resource mobilization and other important decisions (Altbach, 2010).

The global rankings depend heavily on the research performance of the institutions. For example, the THE Rankings give 30% weight to citations, 30% to research, and of the 30% weight given to teaching, about 8% is related to the Ph D programme (Jalote, 2019) The probable reason for such heavy emphasis on research is that, that probably it is the only thing which can be reliably measured (Altbach,2010). Most top-ranking universities are research focused and are widely respected for the path breaking research by them. It is important to note that one of the main functions of university i.e. teaching is widely ignored in most of the rankings. The reason remains that the quality of teaching and learning is practically impossible to measure. Moreover, there is bias towards the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) disciplines and rankings are dominated by the STEM institutions. As a matter of fact,only STEM Indian institutions figure in the global rankings. Another unavoidable bias is towards the institutions with English as a medium of instructions.

Amsler& Bolsmann (2012) say that world rankings are result of commodification of knowledge and has given rise to transnational capitalist

class. They result into a different kind of social exclusion. It leads to redefinition of social purposes of education. They regard world rankings as a kind of neo liberal business which promotes neoliberal rationalities at both national and global levels. The criterions of rankings are aligned with the neoliberal rationalities and the educational institutions also prioritize their deliverables according to the criterions of the rankings. India as one of the emerging economies of the world is also playing to the tunes of the world ranking system and is giving priority to research over other social purposes of institutions of higher education.

5. International Perspective

In the month of March, 2020, the Chinese Government has come up with directives that lack of research publications should not be a barrier to granting degrees or recognition to academicians. This is a stark contrast to several Indian universities which make publications in Scopus journals with your research guide a mandatory requirement for granting PhD degrees and masters level degrees. (Joyce Lau and Jing Liu, 2020) The Chinese government has also decided to do away with the payment of financial bonuses to researches for publications. This is also opposite to the system in India higher education, where a PAR (Performance Appraisal Report) has a very prominent mention of Academic publications. This change has been on the cards for some time now with the top administration, including the president of China realizing that research done by scholars is resulting in publications against their name, but is rarely contributing towards social development and helping solve real life problems. The whole point of promoting academic research in social sciences (and even sciences) is so that academicians will be motivated to take up complex real-life problems and give simplified implementable explanations and solutions for the same. This policy in China will affect the entire recruitment and doctoral training programs. This has come in the wake of China being ranked second worldwide in the coveted and prestigious web of science list of highly cited publications. (Mallapaty, 2020)

Germany, another progressive country with a history of great academic luminaries in sciences has a long-standing tradition of preventing the quantitative judgment of an academician's CV but rather focusing more on the quality of publications. The German Science Foundation publishes a list of guidelines every year where it is explicitly specified that a researcher will be judged by the long-standing impact of his research and not on the quantity of publications. (Errenand Shaw and Morfeld, 2016) The German academia have long realized that the stick and carrot policy which works in private corporate culture where manual labor is motivated to give their optimum level of productivity by incentivization does not work in academia. For creative endeavors like academic research, where a moment of brilliance or a stroke of genius can change the course of evolution of mankind, motivation and free space is the only way you can support them with. A case in point would be Albert Einstien, who by 1905, his breakthrough year in science, had published

only few academic publications under his belt. However, he got the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1921 for his work which spanned two decades. This level of commitment and dedication can be rarely spotted in academicians of today, especially in the context of India, where the career progress reports have to be duly updated every year with a pressure to showcase publications. Even in conventional sciences, academicians are rarely taking risks and are unwilling to fail with their experiments and are sticking to topics which will give them quick results and even quicker publications. It is common knowledge that topics that will give an academician quick publication are not the same topics which will bring about a groundbreaking intervention in their discipline. This rather unfortunate trend is the state of affairs in India. Similar example can be taken that of Dr. James Watson, whose path breaking research paper in 1953 led to the first known DNA Structure. In 1958, when he became the associate professor at Harvard, he had merely 18 research papers under his belt. The selection panel naturally ignored the quantity but couldn't ignore the visionary nature of his research. Netherlands, a small European country with a rich history of quality academicians over the centuries, too felt trapped by these systemic changes. The biggest debate in Dutch academia today is how to revamp their academic rigor and move beyond numbers. Today, scientific novelty and research driven by curiosity is given more importance than dead numbers. A multidimensional holistic approach is used to judge an upcoming academician and a prospective job seeker than just relying on their number of publications. (Benedictus and Miedema and Ferguson, 2020) Information about the courses designed by the faculty, student engagement, contribution in other academic endeavors, multidisciplinary approach to work, entrepreneurship and community outreach are some novel parameters on which the candidate is assessed. This has helped researchers move out of their closeted confined spaces in their laboratories and interact with society on a broader scale. In the context of India, it will still take time to implement such broad-minded thinking, where PhD supervisors are evaluated on the number of PhD students who have been supervised by them rather than on the quality of the work supervised by them. For internal promotions and new positions, job seekers are just asked to submit their best three publications and explain why. It is a far cry from Indian universities, where applicants come armed with reams of CV stacked with multiple papers presented, published and book chapters written where they hope to dazzle with the sheer number of their achievements rather than its impact on society. There is always this conundrum in academic publication, where the journals and magazines which are free and non indexed usually have a wider readership compared to the highly rated ones whose membership requires huge subscription costs and is limited to the close-knit academic elite. Social Sciences has especially faced this huge dichotomy for decades.

6. Recommendations:

1. It is very important to understand that different disciplines have different research parameters and expectations. They cannot be measured on the same scale. Research in Law cannot be compared to research in Anthropology and the same cannot be the same for conventional sciences like Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. Hence, it is expected that different Universities and academic bodies formulate their own rules and guidelines autonomously which will be acceptable and binding on all. This should also be made a part of the learning curriculum of a young researcher who aspires to make a career out of academics. At this point of time, the only difference we have is that of footnoting styles where law students are expected to adhere to Harvard Bluebook while humanities and other social sciences students are expected to cite their footnotes through APA. Just a cursory glance at the list of Scopus indexed journal list will make it clear as to how some disciplines are covered as their primary theme by majority of journals, while some disciplines very rarely have publication opportunities. For example, an Indian researcher wanting to do research on niche India issues will find it very difficult to find Indian journals covering their theme. This disparity needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

2. The way Research Methodology (RM) is taught is vastly different in the western countries and the global south, especially India. This gulf is in terms of exposure, academic rigor and quality of pedagogy. In most American and European Universities, RM is truly the foundation on which an academician builds her/his research design. In India, unfortunately, RM is just a compulsory part of the Pre PhD coursework exercise for a stipulated number of hours which has to be completed by a scholar after which they get the gate pass to start their formal research work. Most state and central universities are notorious for ignoring the RM part in their coursework. American universities conduct their coursework for a minimum of 2 years before a doctoral candidate formally starts his research journey. There is an urgent need to revamp this system for us to have good researchers. Most Indians don't come from a background of research education as masters level education doesn't have a dissertation type system compulsory for their degree. The research gap in terms of quality is vast and hence the emphasis on numbers is not exactly a good exercise to evaluate a researcher.

3. Most Universities (State, Central, Private, Deemed) don't have enough infrastructure to support quality research ideas. In engineering, except for the IITs and some honorable exceptions, most universities have got converted into a conveyor belt of degrees. Social Sciences are even worse placed. The priority of humanities in India is already quite below in the pecking order of career choices. Expecting ground breaking theoretical intervention to put current social experiences into perspective requires a fertile ground for creative ideas to blossom and encourage. In such a scenario, if the emphasis shifts from quality of research publication to mere numbers, the already neglected systemic apathy will continue its downward spiral. It is no surprise that all the way from Hargobind Khurana to Abhijit Banerjee, all Indian origin academicians had

to take help of foreign shores to give wings to their ideas. The unnecessary emphasis on number of publications is therefore, not helping the cause. All Universities, need to provide adequate organizational support (Not necessarily only financial) direction, support, help in retaining quality , supervising and nudging the researcher in the correct direction.

4. As mentioned above, there is a huge difference between what is popular and what is publishable. Quite often, there are areas of scientific research which are very niche in nature and hence don't have adequate readership nor the correct platform to showcase their outputs. This puts them at an obvious disadvantage over the other areas of research which are more public friendly and are easily digested by the overall academic community. Hence, a purely statistical comparison of these disciplines in terms of their research output will be a gross injustice. Hence, a cursory glance on any reputed indexing lists will show a rising trend of journals having broad multidisciplinary publications over having papers published in a very concentrated area of research. Thus, instead of making citation scores the primary marker of the success of an academician, it should be replaced with a basket of requirements which will cover the holistic growth of the professor in his field. The ultimate litmus test for any academician is the acceptance from students and peers about his/her method of imparting knowledge and the impact of the various pedagogic methods. It takes skill and competence to take a concept and simplify it and present it, whether it be through classroom education or through a research paper. An academician has to be scrutinized on these pedagogic skills which also cover the gamut of his discipline over research papers published in closed exclusive access journals whose readership is not more than the people who publish in it. In such a scenario, terms like 'Impact factor'. 'cite score' etc. become irrelevant. Academics is making the fallacy of comparing a scholar of English Literature who deals with classics and semantics with a Nuclear Physics professor, whose area of expertise requires different skill set.

5. Time and again, the academic community is stunned by several ugly revelations of scientific studies being pulled back due to the inaccuracy of the data or the purposive data manipulation. The crux of the entire problem is the weak state of the opaque peer review process. Most reputed journals have an internal process of double-blind peer review of research papers. Although the intention behind the same is noble, the fact remains that peer review is not necessarily a lucrative vocation and is often unpaid in nature. Add on to that the fact that there is not much credit assigned in being a peer reviewer, makes it a frowned upon activity. Along with that, there is very little scope or rigor to identify manipulated data. Thus, the crux of the problem is the peer review process. The governing bodies need to be extra vigilant if they have to avoid inaccurate research from being published. The ultimate goal should be to retain the trust of the general academia in the process and that cannot happen unless the peer review process is made more transparent.

7. Concluding Observations:

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic since February, 2020, there has been a remarkable increase in academic publications trying to analyze the global concern from all possible vantage points, hoping to conclude with pathbreaking findings and gain critical academic acclaim. Journals having themes ranging from Medical, Socio Political and Economics are engaged in this race to bring in special editions to “publish” their work to earn the coveted spotlight. Coupled with the incessant and now infamous need to publish or perish, academicians are outdoing themselves. This trend, unfortunately, leaves room for data manipulation, unethical practices or sometimes hastily published results without rigorous field trials and peer review. The latest example of *The Lancet*, an academic journal who had to retract findings of a study published in May 2020 about the inability of HCQ (Hydroxychloroquine) to treat Covid 19 symptoms is just one example. The World Health Organization took heed of the research article and stopped using HCQ for the field trials. Later, it was revealed that the veracity of the data was inconclusive and hence, WHO resumed the use of HCQ to conduct vaccine trails. This entire incident put a big question mark over the process of academic publications which is full of non-transparent roadblocks creating a toxic academic environment which is detrimental to the purity of genuine research.

To conclude, the problem that the academic world is facing right now is the problem of extreme opacity which allows research papers which are inherently flawed and dubious to hide in plain sight. The simple solution would be to increase the use of transparent measures of scrutiny, make the process of peer review more rigorous, reanalyze the papers for accuracy of predictions before publications, uphold the integrity and values of the journal in high regard and never waver from the set goals, make sure that they hire the services of expert statistical reviewers if needed to cross check the references and make it an academically enriching experience for the author as well as for the reader and the larger academic community which is held in high esteem around the world. The common citizens of the world look up to academia with lot of hope and expect nothing but the best from the scholarly brains. It is high time academicians respect this pedestal on which they have been put and work towards enhancing their reputation and establishing status quo. Only when larger realm of academia considers it their moral responsibility to course correct their wrongs, will the respect for the various disciplines go up and not diminish because of these irregularities.

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