

# Traps for the unmindful researcher

## Journal jugglery

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flat. And just in case you were wondering, the APC/F for an article is a most reasonable Rs 1,500, and the journal helpfully indicates that a contributor will get 25 API points since it is an "International, Refereed (*sic*), Indexed and Peer-reviewed Journal", one, moreover, that is on the now all-important University Grants Commission Journal List.

A word about this List might be in order. The "UGC Approved List of Journals" [<http://ugc.ac.in/journalist/>] contains the names of all the journals where Indian academics must publish in order to score API points. The List became a necessity when it came to the notice of the powers-that-be who regulate higher education in our country that, almost immediately after the API system of awarding points for publishing was introduced, academics began publishing in journals that no one had heard of, let alone seen. Soon these journals began to actively solicit contributions and/or invite academics to serve on their editorial boards or reviewers' panels or whatever. Your humble scribe is still regularly inundated with emails that say, "... reviews papers within one week of submission and publishes accepted articles on the internet immediately upon receiving the final versions. Our fast review-

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ing process is our strength." As also "... aims at to (*sic*) publish unpublished, original research articles and make available a new platform to the scholars of Language, Literature and Culture. It deserves to promote (*sic*) the young researchers and attempts to cultivate the research aptitude among teachers in the higher educational (*sic*) system." The ellipses above stand for journals whose names shall not sully the pages of a respectable publication such as this. Perhaps the most bizarre part is that the second journal quoted from above is not only "a Peer-reviewed (refereed) International Journal in (*sic*) English Language and Literature" (according to its publicity pamphlet) but also on the UGC Journal List. So, clearly, in spite of all its efforts, the UGC has not been able to locate and eliminate such distinctly dodgy entities from its list.

Lest one think this is a phenomenon peculiar to India, one needs

only to look at Beall's List of Predatory Journals and Publishers [<http://bealllist.weebly.com/>], the magnificent labour of love of Jeffrey Beall, the American librarian and scholar who first identified and named such journals and created the criteria-set that is still used to judge a journal's credentials. Sadly, Beall had to take down his own blog which had this list, probably as a result of treading on the toes of influential publishers of such journals, but his list is still available at the URL given earlier. More importantly perhaps, Beall alerted the larger scholarly world to the existence of this shadowy world of dubious academic publishing (usually online, most often open-access), where adherence to the letter of the law is usually directly proportional to the absence of academic substance.

All this seems to have created something of a catch-22 situation for Indian academia and academics. On the one hand, teachers have to publish, in journals which are on the UGC List, in order to get recognition, credit, scores, promotions, prestige and so on, and the need for such a list is patently obvious in an academic publishing ecosystem teeming with frauds and predators. And, yet, on the other hand, one knows that the most cunning and persistent of such exploiters, fakes and frauds will not only find their way around all attempts at quality control but also gloat about their success on their websites.

Perhaps the only thing to do in this situation is hope and pray that the UGC will periodically review and revise its List to weed out the undesirables and increase the ranks of the deserving. Only then may we expect an improvement in the quality of research published by our colleagues. But maybe the UGC ought to begin right away by doing some essential housekeeping. Here's an example. The department where I work brings out one of the oldest journals in the subject, published regularly for six decades now. In the UGC List, rather peculiarly, the *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature* appears twice, the first time (with UGC-assigned Journal No. 41264) "English" as the journal's primary subject and the second time (UGC Journal No. 41570) with "English; Linguistics and Language" as its subject. As T.S. Eliot put it, "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?"

In the 17 years, from 1922 to 1939, that it was published, *The Criterion* was possibly the best-known, and probably the best, literary journal in the English language. Founded by the poet-critic-dramatist/cultural commentator/general fount of wisdom—soon to be Nobel laureate (in 1948), Thomas Stearns—better known as TS—Eliot, *The Criterion* trod a very conscious, deliberately defined international path. The first issue of October 1922 included Hermann Hesse, who contributed "German Poetry of To-Day", an essay on James Joyce's *Ulysses* by the Frenchman, Valery Larbaud, a translation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "Plan of a Novel" (one of the translators was Virginia Woolf), not to forget Eliot's own modernist masterpiece, *The Waste Land*, among others.

Should you wish to look up something in *Criterion* and google "criterion journal", be prepared to be surprised. For, in first place, among some 50 million search results, will be a journal that rejoices that it "is refereed (*sic*) e-journal and is designed to publish theoretical articles and book reviews on interdisciplinary cross-currents in the humanities and social sciences", while elsewhere it claims to be "designed to publish theoretical and research articles on English Literature and Language, Humanities and Social Sciences". Its linguistically idiosyncratic web pages will not merely entertain but educate and alert readers to a brave new phenomenon in the proliferating groves of Indian academe, to wit the API-inflating, APC/F-charging, QGM-inspired "scholarly" e-journal, where API stands for academic performance indicators, APC/F for article processing charges or fees and QGM is Quick Gun Murugan. Such journals promise to publish, in double-quick time (hence QGM), articles by college and university teachers who need to improve their API scores (now mandatory for moving up the academic ladder) for a small APC/F. This particular journal, for example, takes 15 to 25 days to accept, or reject, a submission and promises to publish a piece in two months

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