

Original Article

# Ayurveda publishing: The ground realities, concurrent problems and possible remedies

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## ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is gradually getting more acceptances in the world. The fact is visible through increasing number of Ayurveda articles in leading medical journals and also through the chapters on Ayurveda in various biomedical publications. Although the world is now looking up at the authentic information about Ayurveda, the status of Ayurveda publishing in India is not very promising. Poor workmanship while preparing the articles on Ayurveda and non professional approaches in publishing are the reasons of the poor show and this requires to be seriously taken up.

**Keywords** publishing, Ayurveda, research, journal, peer review

## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is slowly yet steadily taking its place at the center stage of the global health care delivery scenario. This perception is emerging from seeing the phenomenal increase in the number of Ayurveda or related articles appearing in leading national and international medical journals of significant repute. The journals who have recently allowed Ayurveda articles to appear on their pages are no other than Nature, PLOS, BMJ, Lancet and many more of the similar stature in the medical fraternity (Dance, 2016; Thirthalli et al., 2016).

This may also be noticed and proposed as a point of debate that many of these high end journals often choose the nadir of Ayurveda to get published (Mishra et al., 2016; Singh, 2013). Naturally, this makes the believers of Ayurveda little uneasy but, seeing from the other angle, this seems an admirable job, the job of critically evaluating Ayurveda on scientific grounds and the job which should had come primarily from our side, from the people of Ayurveda. A critic to Ayurveda eventually poses a challenge to its values, methods and approaches but also opens an opportunity to look at these problems in a wider perspective that too with an absolute ease in finding them with the help of others. Unfortunately, while noticing and reacting to the former, under the emotional outburst, we often fail to recognize the later.

On a positive note, criticism is also considered as an admiration in disguise. It happens only when something reaches to the heights of getting noticed by the people who are the giants in the said field.

Although the numbers of Ayurveda articles appearing in indexed journals are still far less comparing to Traditional Chinese Medicine, the number of this appearance has definitely gone up in recent past years.

The global impact of Ayurveda is also becoming

increasingly visible. Seeing the common people's acceptance of the Ayurveda swadeshi movement started by Swami Ramdeo, this is by and large realized that to bring Ayurveda to the next level, it requires a branding in a way of its own. The qualities and potentials of Ayurveda which are experienced by a few so far, are required to be genuinely and essentially projected in the format having an appeal both for the common consumers and also for the rationalists from the elite strata.

Having moved proactively, by placing his steps strategically, no wonder, Acharya Balkrishna, the co-founder of Patanjali Ayurveda is recently listed in Forbes list of India's richest people with a respectable 42nd place having a net worth of \$2.5 billion, owing to his 97 percent holding in Patanjali Ayurveda.

Publishing in Ayurveda has also come up as a promising avenue for many. Many leading science publishing houses have shown their interest in the subject of Ayurveda. Springer, Elsevier, CRC and Oxford publishing groups are few examples of increasing interest of the world towards authentic Ayurveda literature (Rastogi, 2014). A substantial number of chapters on Ayurveda are found included regularly in many biomedical books published by such leading publishers and edited by top leaders from the respective fields (Rastogi et al., 2010; Singh, 2017).

Looking at publishing industry pertaining to Ayurveda in India; however the picture is not very bright. There are limited players in the field of Ayurveda publishing and most of them are adherent to the age old thoughts and technologies of publishing. There are no real robust systems of peer reviewing the book proposals in Ayurveda before it is actually commissioned for publication. The result is the flooding of reader's market with huge number of substandard publications marked with poor content and presentation.

Publishing of an Ayurveda journal in India is equally gloomy. There are only a handful journals of Ayurveda originating from India and sticking to the ethics and standards of publishing. Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (JAIM), Ayu, Annals of Ayurvedic Medicine (AAM), and Ancient Science of Life (ASL) however have set the examples of such standards. There had also arisen a new class of publishing called predatory publishing. Although this class is there throughout the publishing community, its knock at the

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door of Ayurveda is clearly audible. There are number of online journals (print also) who promise of publishing an article within no time on the condition that the author has to pay a handsome amount of money to get this favor. These journals are beyond the purview of ethical publishing, peer reviewing and indexing and they are surviving only because of a pseudo consideration of publication as a booster to the career (Lakhotia, 2015). The common prey to these predatory journals are the post doc students and the new faculty members who are tempted or forced to have publications before the submission of their thesis or for whom a publication means a thrust to their career. Unfortunately, presently the career promotion system in Ayurveda is based on numbers alone and it has not yet developed a mechanism to reward the quality of a publication by judging what is published and where it is published. This is also noteworthy that because of lack of a proper evaluation mechanism, many such predatory journals also found a place in recently published University Grants Commission's Approved Journals List and hence are claiming for their legitimacy. Very high and often unjustifiable article processing charges from high end journals is also a reason for researchers being attracted towards substandard journals (Rastogi, 2017).

For the genuine journals of Ayurveda, there lying are different sets of problems. The primary problem in Ayurveda journal publishing is the acute scarcity of good research articles having a publication value. There are over 3000 PG seats in various Ayurveda institutions in the country. Besides this, over a few hundred candidates also emerge out every year as PhDs in Ayurveda. A good number of researchers from various research institutions also deal with various research projects related to Ayurveda. CCRAS under the span of its 30 research units spread nationwide; various national research institutions of CSIR like NBRI, CDRI, CIMAP, and IITR; CSIR; DST; DRDO; SERB and various national laboratories are examples of pioneering research institutions doing extensively in the field of Ayurveda (Pawardhan et al., 2009; Baghel, 2011). A whole new initiative under the ambit of Science in Ayurveda (SIA) was taken up by Office of Principle Scientific Advisor to the Govt of India few years back. About 10 high potential projects have been sanctioned under the scheme under the guidance of Prof MS Valiathan. There are also many universities having their interest in Ayurveda. Many private pharmaceutical companies are also continuously engaged in research in Ayurveda. A large sum of money is being laundered to research in Ayurveda by Ministry of Ayush through EMR mechanism where anyone with a genuine research project aiming to strengthen Ayurveda can get the funding. We also know that research is an important component of the MD and PhD curricula of Ayurveda. In a recent development, UGC has granted PhD in various disciplines of Ayush through its constituent universities and requested all the universities to identify the places for prospective PhD students in various disciplines. Ministry of Ayush has sanctioned a good number of fellowships for such PhD students which may work as SRF in various research projects run by ministry through various research councils. Unfortunately, despite of these many efforts and large number of Ayurveda researches being conducted in the country, the actual submissions of research papers submitted to Indian Ayurveda journals are far less than the threshold to ensure the survival of a journal. Recently in the editor's conclave conducted at 7th World Ayurveda Congress, Kolkata, this issue was discussed in detail and was observed that as Ayurveda journals from India are not indexed at high end databases and also do not have impact factors, many good researchers from India do not prefer their papers to be submitted in Indian journals. A sectional approach of Indian

databases to Ayurveda journals is also a point to be noted. IndMED is an Indian data base pertaining to the medical journals from India and abroad. This is managed by NIC under the guidance of ICMR. When IndMED was enquired for the possibility of getting an Ayurveda journal indexed in this, the answer was no as the data base limited itself to the indexing of modern medical journals only.

Quality of the submission to Ayurveda journals is another issue requiring a serious concern (Kotecha, 2015). Out of total submissions to Ayurveda journals, more than half generally belong to the category of immediate rejection. Being written by the amateurs, these articles look like submitted in such a hurry that they fail to keep a track of what they wish to convey. Dealing with these articles becomes a burden to the editorial team of any journal. Those who pass through first test of editorial review, enter into the peer review cycle. This cycle marks the beginning of another phase of problems. There are only a handful peer reviewers in Ayurveda who actually do the justice with their assignments. The blunt remarks like 'publishable without any correction' and 'rejected' are not very uncommon in ayurvedic peer reviewing. If an editor receives a remark like this, it's his headache to comprehend it to the author that why this decision is bestowed upon his article. Reviewers do fail to realize the purpose of review while making their shallow remarks without a component of exploring the possibility of improving the article. A delayed response time is also critical in Ayurveda publishing. Two or three reminders to the reviewers are almost customary to get a review done and some never turn-up despite of their initial agreeing for the review and of multiple reminders for the requested job.

Now, when the review comments are received from the reviewers, a new set of problem starts. Authors in their beginning phase, upon entering into the peer review cycle, find themselves on cloud nine and so respond to the comments casually in the perception that their write-ups have excellent publishing value. Failing to the request of a point to point reply, highlighting the corrections, taking care for the language, reference setting is often missed in author revisions and editor receives a summarized response from the author saying that the revision is done.

Now if at all a reviewer wants to check, if his suggestions are met adequately during the revision process, this would be the hell of a job for him to locate where the corrections have actually been made. It is equally cumbersome for editor to locate at revisions and the results are nothing but the delays in decisions.

Poor readership is the final nail in the coffin of Ayurveda publishing. There are meager subscribers to Ayurveda journals. Ayurvedic teaching institutions are not yet ready to realize the value of reading and publishing. Individual readership of Ayurveda journals is almost negligible. Ayurvedic journals therefore survive on the basis of financial supports like grants, donations, advertisements etc. A readership bankruptcy for Ayurveda journals in India was nicely pointed out by Antonio Morondi from Italy during the 7th WAC at Kolkata. He simply has enquired about who are the readers of Ayurveda journals in India? And what for they actually read the journal? Surprisingly there were no clear answers to the question. This was directly indicating about the readership crisis in Ayurveda in India and lack of real life connectivity as one of its possible reason.

Limited financial supports limits the quality of publishing and administrative activities required in publishing. On line publishing provides an access to on line submission and editing system. This is however expensive and is not affordable by

many without a good financial support.

Finally, if we look at the editorial boards of many Ayurveda journals, we may find many among them more of the cosmetic rather than of a contributory value.

This is how we see that publishing in Ayurveda as a real challenge. The remedies to these all problems essentially lie within the cause of the problem. A publication is considered as an outcome of well planned and executed research (Patwardhan, 2015). The problem therefore begins with the planning of research in Ayurvedic institutions. Every component of the research in Ayurveda in such institutions, the supervisors, co supervisors and the investigators are required to be given a real meaning of research planning and its execution. Once a research is executed nicely, its documentation becomes rather easy. For documentation also, every potential author may be required to be given the knowledge of how to present his research to give it a publication value. On the part of peer review, every potential peer reviewer may also be required to be educated as how a review should be done keeping the real essence of making a review intact. Finally, the editorial board should be ready to take up the responsibilities of its position. There should be clear ethical publishing norms which a journal should follow. Finally, despite of all financial constraints, this is the moral responsibility of the journal publishers not to promote any unethical practice in order to ensure the survival of the journal or to make profit from this venture.

It's a long way to go in Ayurveda publishing to bring it to the global standards. But if we begin somewhere, we would certainly be moving forward, no matter how much time we take to reach at the ultimate goal.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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