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Making Indian Journal of Plant Physiology into an Open Access Journal: For Increased Readership and Impact

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Making Indian Journal of Plant Physiology into an Open Access Journal: For Increased Readership and Impact

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The Indian Society for Plant Physiology (ISPP) was registered under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860: S/1355 in the year 1958 and since then it is serving its members by organizing annual meetings, symposia, seminars, workshops, conferences and publishing peer-reviewed Indian Journal of Plant Physiology (IJPP) [ISSN: 0019-5502] with starter grant of Rs. 1500/- from Government of India. The society has grown to the present strength of about 650 life members and with ~1000 subscribers from India and abroad. It is unfortunate that though the IJPP is listed in the Thomson Reuters Masters Journal List, it has zero impact factor (IF) till date. However, it is rated by National Academy of Agricultural Sciences (NAAS) as 4.0 on 1 – 10 point scale. Now it is a issue before us that why the impact factor is low though it is very popular with ~1000 subscribed readership. It may be surprise for all the fellow members of the ISPP for its zero impact factor though the IJPP is published quarterly with ~80 articles annually. Taking the issues of IJPP (January – December, 2002) Shokeen and Kaushik (2004) reported that, the ratio of author self citation to total citations is low (1:17) and journal self citation to total citation is very low (1:33). Moreover, in the 61 articles published in the issues studied, 18 authors are from abroad out of the 187 authors reflecting that the journal does not figure on the priority list among Indian and International plant physiologists (Shokeen and Kaushik, 2004). This issue has to be addressed for which, we are seeking the consensus of all the esteemed members of ISPP to press for the demand to transform the IJPP from print closed access to online and open access in order to make it world wide visible, increase its readership & impact and accelerate the rate of scientific progress in the field of plant physiology which is called Open Access (OA).

“The scholarly literature which is digital, online, free of charge, and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions is known as Open Access” (Suber 2004).

The official website of ISPP <http://www.ispp-online.org> is laid out with adequate and up to date information. While this is being done, ISPP could also launch its own journal website where in the submission to publication editorial work flow could be done online. Now the average time from submission to acceptance and publication had reduced from one year to six months or even less as compared to earlier issues. However, the journal can not accommodate more than 20 articles per issue. This can be overcome only with the online publication and management system. At present, the IJPP is being hosted on *IndianJournals* portal <http://www.indianjournals.com> and the contents are available only on payment even for the ISPP life members. Moreover, the hosted site is not in compliance with the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) by which the metadata (authors, title, year, issue, abstract etc.) are harvested by the archives with harvesters. There are currently almost 1300 repositories around the world and the contents of all repositories are being indexed by web search engines such as Google and Google Scholar and creating on-line Open Access databases of freely-available global research. We would like to point out that simply by making journal online and not making it “free” (free as in freedom) to authors and readers and hosting without OAI-PMH compliance would create a major obstacle in the knowledge sharing and dissemination to the prospective researchers and readers.

The *IndianJournals* portal is a commercial entity and the contract between the not-for-profit

scientific society and commercial entity might not be good for the free flow of research communications. While the editorial work and referee work are undertaken by the society's Executive Council (EC), Editorial Board (EB) and other members voluntarily, the *Indian Journals* is hosting and marketing the journal articles arose from public funded research for profit. By this way, the taxpayer has to pay twice: once for the research and again for accessing the same. This issue had been well debated by which the *National Institute of Health (NIH) Public Access Policy* had come into force in United States of America (USA) to ensure open access to NIH funded research. With the implementation of this policy, the scientists have to submit final peer-reviewed journal manuscripts that arise from NIH funds to the digital archive PubMed Central (Open Access Repository) upon acceptance for publication. Now in order to bring a strong legislation and to extend the NIH policy to other departments, *Federal Research Public Access Act 2009* bill was also introduced in USA in the month of June 2009. This might inspire our Government to introduce a similar kind of bill for Open Access of Publicly Funded Research when the *Bayh-Dole Act of 1980* of USA inspired for the introduction of the "*Protection and Utilization of Public Funded Intellectual Property Bill 2008*" in the Rajya Sabha.

Making peer-reviewed literature immediately accessible, searchable, and reusable to anyone in the world would achieve the goal of scholarly association (Doyle *et al.*, 2004). In recent past, the reports are available that the articles that are freely available online are cited more frequently than the closed ones (Lawrence, 2001; Eysenbach, 2006, MacCallum and Parthasarathy, 2006). The OA movement gained momentum with the Budapest Open Access Initiative (February 2002), Bethesda Statement on Open Access Publishing (June 2003), and Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (October 2003); these were the most central and influential milestones in the OA movement. The epicenter of OA movement in India is Indian Institute of Sciences, Bangalore. In India now most of the societies are committed to open-access and are providing current and archives of full-text literature. For example, all the journals of the Indian Academy of Sciences (IAS) and Indian National Science Academy (INSA) are open-access journals. The Journal of Tropical Agriculture (JTROPAG) <http://www.jtropag.in/index.php/ojs> from Kerala Agricultural University and The Open Access Journal of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (OAJMAP) <http://www.ojs.oksociety.in/index.php/oajmap/> from Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Association of India (MAPAI) are the good examples of OA journals in agricultural sciences. Recently, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) had adopted Open Access Policy which might lead the way in adopting a policy on Open Access by all the Publicly Funded Research Institutions (PFRIs) in India.

The American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) members when they are the corresponding to the '*Plant Physiology*' journal, their articles are published with full open access (Ort, 2006). The Editor-in-Chief of Plant Physiology, Donald R. Ort says that the journal's impact factor is 6.114 and is cited 39,766 times in 2005 and they strongly believe that by making open access to their articles, citation will increase (Ort, 2006). The publishers had adopted authors pay model for non members to make the articles available in open access. Similar kind of model is adopted by various other scientific societies like MAPAI which had adopted a model in which all the life members can publish articles without any author fee but others had to pay Rs. 400 per article upon acceptance. In addition, it also accepts voluntary donations to the journal and the society for the sustainability. When it was proposed to ISPP to make IJPP open access, the EC members and EB members, had expressed the fear of '*revenue erosion*' if they convert the traditional subscription-based print journal to open access. It would be noted that by making online and open access, the cost of printing of the journal could be saved while increasing the readership

and citation. As per the 'Statement of Accounts' (2008 Annual Meeting), for printing the journal, the annual expenditure is ~Rs. 3,00,000. If the journal goes online and open access, the expenditure would be only Rs. 20,000 or at the most Rs. 50,000 which would be ~7% to ~17% of the present annual expenditure. On the other hand, if both print and online is followed, additional ~7% to ~17% has to be invested and that investment would given in return the increase in the journal readership, citation and impact. We have to set aside for the moment the question of 'how feasible it is for societies to alter their journal access policies'. There is now a broad consensus that, widespread open access to scientific publications is good for scientists and good for science. The concern that open-access publications would be the death knell is misguided as the researchers and others join societies for the many benefits of membership beyond simply discounted or "free" subscriptions to journals (Doyle *et al.*, 2004).

The web 2.0 technologies can be effectively utilized for transition into electronic journal. The Public Knowledge Project, Canada had developed *Free & Open Source Software* for online Journal Management and Publication System called as '*Open Journal Systems*' to make the idea of open access possible. The earlier referred journals, JTROPAG and OAJMAP are using the OJS software for hosting and publication online. Now in the country, Open Knowledge Society (OKS) <http://www.oksociety.in> is extending support to the organizations and scientific societies to launch their online and open access journal and/or to transform their existing print journal into online and open access, with a minimal cost of Rs. 5000 per annum as institutional membership fee.

In conclusion, the ISPP would be benefited by making IJPP open access. At present the society have no source of funds other than the proceeds from IJPP journal subscription, membership and the grants from Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to fund activities like annual meetings, seminars, symposia and institution of awards. The society would save ~Rs. 2, 95,000 per annum if it becomes an institutional member of OKS by paying Rs. 5000 which means that IJPP can be online and open access with only investment of Rs. 5000 per annum and without updating the Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and thus saved amount can be effectively utilized for the societies mandated activities. It is said that the societies which embrace the latest developments taking place in scholarly publishing would increase their membership and readership of publications more than societies that cling to the potentially unstable status quo (Doyle *et al.*, 2004).

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