

## EDITORIAL

With the coming out of the present number, the '*Transactions of the Institute of Indian Geographers*' has completed two decades (1979-1998) of uninterrupted publication, without a single issue being skipped or the two half yearly numbers compressed into one, to be brought out in a single volume at the end of the year. Most numbers have carried research papers, sometimes short notes, book reviews, brief proceedings of the I.I.G. conference, notes and news and, whenever required, obituaries of eminent Indian geographers and in one case that of a distinguished American geographer with deep interest in India.

While the Institute may legitimately feel some degree of elation on the twenty years of uninterrupted publication of its Journal; this by no means amounts to an achievement, firstly because a couple of decades is not a long period in the life of a periodical and, secondly, because of the many shortcomings and disabilities which the Journal has yet to overcome. The survival of the Journal has to be weighed against the quality it has attained so far. Timely publication has not been an inalienable feature of the Journal, as it should be. On the contrary, frequent delays, often over a period of time, have brought embarrassment primarily to the editor, but also to those who manage the publication of the Journal. The members of the Institute and the contributors and subscribers, to be fair to them, have been very patient and willingly extended co-operation

and encouragement to the editor, yet the latter is familiar with the flaws in fulfilling his responsibility, only too well. The editor thankfully acknowledges the support received and begs their indulgence.

The contributions received for publication can't be typified, yet certain areas appear more popular with the contributors than the others. Agriculture, settlement population and environment have received greater attention. Industries and industrial landscape don't count for much with Indian geographers. Occasionally, there are papers in geomorphology or climatology. Soils and vegetation have yet to make an impact on Indian geography. The vast richness of culture and cultural geography have no takers in Indian geography. In tune with the current trends, concern for the environment is all pervasive. There is more data based writing, and observation based text that talks of changes in the landscape or society is conspicuously missing. No one seems to be thinking of regional geography, the changing personality of a region, or even of synthesising a regional description of the areas not so well known to us, though there is no dearth of such areas.

A significant characteristic in the approach and subject matter of Indian geography is its confinement to micro and local studies. A study which covers the entire country is not so common, and if there is one, it has to be data-based - may these be related to production, area, population or may even be point data

like rainfall. Micro-studies are important, but it is time Indian geographers grew out of the mould prescribed to produce data and local studies and expand the scope of their work to represent a reality that is far more embracing.

The Journal faces several other problems, not entirely of the editor's making. The editor has his own woes, many of which are hard to be addressed, as these are related to the state of the discipline in India and the academic disposition of Indian geographers who are the main contributors to the Journal. There are very few articles which can claim the status of a research paper. A large number of them are marginal cases where some effort in investigation is involved, some need drastic revision and a better organisation while there are some that are hardly readable. It is my experience that papers returned for revision seldom come back. The contributors, instead of considering the editorial suggestion, try and often succeed in getting the papers published elsewhere. The concern for quality is minimal and unfortunately this disregard for quality cuts across the entire segment of Indian geography. Even some university professors are guilty of this lapse, in forwarding joint papers often written by their students, without carefully looking into the content and quality of the paper.

It is important that the contributors read through their papers several times to make sure that there is no hiatus in organisation or that a paragraph is placed in proper sequence or that a sentence carries the intended meaning. While clarity of expression is very important, young geographers should convince themselves of the quality of their paper which may rest on new findings, in terms of the explanations of the processes in society or nature, a better organisation of the theme that facilitates better

understanding or interpretation, demonstration of pattern in the landscape or simply a reportage of little known facts and relationships. The race for counting the number of publications and sometimes even non-publications has become so demanding, more so now, in the days of career advancement, that quality has become a casualty demonstrating a complete disregard for the research content of the papers. And let me state, even at the expense of incurring displeasure of some of my colleagues, that this is the situation with almost all geographical periodicals, including those with longer standing and wider circulation.

One does not expect literary flavour in geographical writings - though certain papers do appear literary pieces with such an appeal that one cannot but admire - yet the language as a medium is meant to convey the intended meaning, and needs to be grammatically correct. Inability to write in English is a handicap faced by many, but to those trained through the medium of an Indian vernacular, the odds are too high. Geographical organisations in India don't have the resources to utilise the services of a full-time paid editor, and the honorary editors, the present one included, and the reviewers, have not only to get themselves acquainted with the content and quality of the papers but are also required, not occasionally but often, to change the structure of the sentences and insert a preposition here and delete a comma there. Indifference, tantamounting to sheer neglect among some contributors is a cause for concern. Not a few contributors send uncorrected, cyclostyled or xeroxed copies of their papers with poorly xeroxed maps despite clear instructions to the contrary. Authors mentioned in the text of the papers don't appear in the 'references', or formulas and equations are wrongly written or the details of

the map don't stand reduction. The contributors have a responsibility as much as the editors, and they should think of the difficulty the editor and the printer might face.

It has not happened in the past, but there is an unmitigated need for the editors of geographical periodicals, in fact for the entire geographical fraternity to think collectively of the ways to address the problem of 'quality' in research. Often during geography workshops, conducted by university departments and colleges, the topic of 'How to write Research Papers?' crops up and ends up with a lip service, and some hints borrowed from 'Research Methodology Text Books' written by book writers and not serious researchers. This problem has to be thoroughly debated in a seminar where those who claim to be researchers should be seriously questioned to evoke meaningful reply from them. A workshop on 'Research Methodology', as I have observed, often ends in lectures on 'Statistical Methods' or 'Map Making' or 'Remote Sensing' techniques. The seminar in some situations is addressed by those who are acquainted with multivariate analysis, but are unfamiliar with the meaning and spirit of research.

The greatest challenge that Indian geography is facing today is 'How to inject Quality in Research?'

The present editor is familiar with other problems like those related to teaching and maintenance of standards, but these could be discussed elsewhere.

The present editor takes the liberty of saying a few words about the state of geographical publications in India. The present day publications, besides text books, include a spate of multi-volume edited thematic series or even a single thematic volume, collection of papers presented at a

seminar, felicitation or memorial volumes (the latter are rare), and even mediocre Ph.D. theses. These find ever ready publishers. The result is for all of us to see. A lot of stuff, unworthy of publication, passes as research and forms in many cases the basis for promotion in the universities.

Research monographs, other than Ph. D. theses, is what is sorely missing from the field.

It would be a worthwhile exercise for those in the geographical power structure of the country to organise a seminar for a couple of days on the 'State of Geographical Publications' in which both publishers and geographers could participate, each group examining the problem from its own perspective.

Back to the '*Transactions of the Institute of Indian Geographers*', I would like to point out that neither the I. I. G. nor its publication the '*Transactions*' owns office space. The office of the I. I. G. is housed in the Geography Department of the University of Pune, and the editor, the secretary, the treasurer and other office bearers have to operate from their own place of work. An office of the I.I.G. or even an editorial office, properly housed, would not only make the publication of the Journal smooth but would also facilitate its publication on schedule leading to an all round improvement. This reflects, in no uncertain terms, the paucity of funds that imposes economization as a policy and invariably affects the quality of the Journal. It is not that better quality paper and printing presses are not available, but these entail expenditure beyond the annual income of the I. I. G. from different sources. I understand the I.I.G. is likely to appeal to all its members for voluntary donations. It is a welcome move and might strengthen the financial base of the Institute and, in turn, the quality of the Journal.

The '*Transactions*' after twenty years of publication, is entering a new phase where quality has to be a primary objective both in terms of the standard of contributions and an error free production with an appeal. Let us hope, the Institute with its vast reserve of good will and support rises to the occasion and brings up the Journal to a standard that would ensure not only its continued publication but also evoke admiration from the geographical community and inspire the

young geographers to aim at excellence in geographical research.

Hope, the hopes of this editor are not belied and the next two decades see the '*Transactions of the Institute of Indian Geographers*' emerging as a very serious and progressive research journal in the service of our discipline as well as the society.

— **K. R. Dikshit**  
Editor