

IJDVL 2020-21

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”

— Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

As we come near the end of 2021, we realize what a roller coaster the past couple of years have been. As if the ongoing pandemic was not enough, with its attendant disruption, this was precisely the period during which the journal had to transition from one publisher to another, a task that is considered to be brutally disruptive for any journal even during the best of times. It gives us tremendous satisfaction to record that, despite the double whammy, we could avoid any significant disturbance in our publishing schedule. It was business as usual to the outsider, the only changes being in the exterior of the journal website (ijdv.com) and the manuscript management system. This was a big deal if we also consider that 2020, when the transition took place, also posted a record number of article submissions in *IJDVL*. It is as much a testimony to the diligence of our current publisher as to the untiring efforts of the editorial team (frequently depleted by illness among members and in their families), that no data from any article was lost and the turnover time improved even in these challenging circumstances.

It might seem preposterous that we are so glad that no data was lost, as if we anticipated that the opposite could be the expected outcome! It is because we faced so many unexpected obstacles during the transfer process that such a disaster would have been entirely plausible. As the migration happened between two publishers presumably conforming to the best industry practices, digital data transfer followed the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) guidelines.¹ However, during the actual process of data

transfer, there were discrepancies in three key areas that put our data in jeopardy:

- The publisher provided missing or incomplete archival content, and many of the issue PDFs, which are supposed to be the property of the journal, were incomplete
- The versions of the ‘in process’ articles were not always the latest
- Several contents marked as ‘ahead of print’ were not even galley-proofed.

It was an arduous task to ensure the protection and integrity of our data, on the one hand, and to ensure timely publication of issues, on the other, under these circumstances.

Another fact that calls for minor celebration is that the journal impact factor did not slide down precipitously in all this rigmarole. Though it did drop, as is usual after a change of publisher, *IJDVL* retains its position as the highest ranked Indian scholarly journal – among all STEM (science, technology, engineering and medicine), arts, humanities and social sciences academic journals, a position that it is holding on to since 2017. In fact, the issues with the decline in impact factor that we could trace to our previous publisher (including the absence of an entire issue from the *Web of Science* for the better part of a year because of a bad link) were among the factors that contributed to our decision to migrate to a new publisher at long last, the pandemic notwithstanding.

We are reasonably happy with the immediate outcome of a decision that we mulled over for quite some time. The new manuscript management system has proved to be largely user-friendly all around, leading to a collective heaving of sighs of relief from our contributors, reviewers, and editors

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alike, reminding us how cranky, wonky and plain unreliable the older system had turned out to be over the years. Evidence of our sense of relief has been manifest with innovations that had stalled for some time, be it in layout and formatting or introducing new article types (Musings, Snippets, Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses).

However, if we paint a picture that everything is just perfect now, it will be economizing with the truth. One shortcoming in the present set-up, that we did not bargain for, is the absence of a properly trained production team. As a result, we have had to take up the job of bringing the production department up to speed with the journal's requirements, along with all other nitty-gritty of adjusting to a new system, with results that have been uneven at best. However, one significant change has been the attitude of the publishing team, the willingness to listen, learn and improvise, whenever and wherever needed. This has made our journey worthwhile until now.

Editing is no picnic; neither is publishing. Lest we forget, Kent Anderson, who maintains a list of things that journal

publishers currently do, catalogs 102 items that are yet to be formally contested from anyone who challenges the value of publishers in modern scholarly publishing.² This should give food for thought to observers like the one who said: "At the end of the day, they produce a PDF on a webpage and they archive it. That's it. And it costs the same as a car to do that!"³ However, it is a moot point as to how many publishers *really* do the 102 things on the list and how well they do it. *IJDVL's* journey during 2020-21, which allowed us to present a vision of still calmness among all the tumult within, made us realize the value of publishers in academic publishing, something that we do not often realize or, perhaps, use to take for granted.

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