

EDITORIAL

This editorial is going to be different from the editorials in previous issues in the sense that it seeks to reflect on the articles included in this issue rather than speaking about certain general issues of anthropology, as the editorials did prior to this issue. It proposes to do so without picking on any particular article, in which case this editorial would have to be called a review. However, I am of the view that editorials should ideally reflect on the status of the articles accepted for publication in the journal and go beyond, should the one writing the editorial think it is necessary to do so. The manuscripts have been reviewed by competent scholars already and they have also been revised as per the reviewers' comments. That tedious process cannot be re-opened at this stage, but the accepted articles could be used as the basis for assessing the status of writing anthropology in India and identify some pointers for further discussion in anthropological circles in future and that is what I propose to do in the following paragraphs.

To me, as an editor of a university journal for ten years and as someone who served in the editorial advisory boards of several national and international journals for the past three decades or so, the biggest weakness of most Indian contributors to scientific journals is their inability to communicate in simple, concise and grammatically correct English. Many of my colleagues and friends have chided me for insisting on the minimum standard of English for Indian contributors. I am aware of the fact that, like myself, most of us Indians did not have the privilege of going to English-medium schools where our English language skills could be honed. But one who cannot write in simple English cannot blame one's weakness on one's schooling because one's language skills can be improved with a little effort and determination, much as one's other life-skills can be improved with some effort. There is also Grammarly to help one out.

Second, already bad English looks worse when most authors type out their manuscripts by themselves, which is fine provided they know the basic things about spacing after punctuation marks or about line spacing and indentation. It is also unfortunate that most contributors to academic journals italicize what should not be italicized and use upper case when they should have used the lower case. In short, their manuscripts look clumsy, as they lack aesthetics and they do not inspire anyone to read them. One does not know after a while whether it is their poor English or their poor typing quality that one should blame.

Third, I feel frustrated when I have to correct the references, after detailed guidelines on "how to write references" have been provided to the prospective contributors. I feel angry when I find that the references are incomplete, inconsistent and/or incorrect. There are numerous methodological workshops sponsored by the ICSSR or the UGC but unfortunately, I have not seen any lecture ever arranged on how to write references. I remember how some of the

members of the Board of Studies or School Boards at North-Eastern Hill University, where I taught for about three decades, made fun of me when I pointed out several mistakes in the list of references in each research proposal. It is unfortunate that writing references is not taken seriously by the academic fraternity. Even the easy option to do it the way any standard journal or book has done it is not explored.

Fourth, there are some contributors who think that they have done a great job after they have prepared tables and presented them. They do not even care to provide the date and source of the data presented in their tables and do not help the readers understand what the data are saying. After all, the data do not speak for themselves. The author has to lend voice to them, but unfortunately what the authors often do is simply describe the data and not analyse them for the benefit of their readers. It is also fashionable to use various statistical techniques on the quantitative data presented, but why one statistical technique is chosen and others discarded is rarely explained in any manuscript with quantitative data. Just to say whether a relationship is statistically significant or not is not sufficient; it is also necessary to explain why it is significant or not.

Finally, one of the weakest parts of a manuscript is generally the review of literature. It appears that most authors do not value the importance of a review or do not know how to do a good review. Many authors write their review of literature in chronological order or devote a paragraph to each literature separately. It is also sad that they are often not clear what literature should be reviewed and what not. But for me, both as a former editor and teacher, review of literature is one of the most important components of a journal article for it not only lets the readers know the existing status of knowledge in a particular area of research but also the gaps in the same. Without a good review of literature, one does not know whether an article is a repetition or not.

I would like to end my editorial by stating that we as Indian anthropologists have a long way to go to achieve the world standard. As individuals, some of us have done well even internationally, but what matters is whether we have been able to help our anthropological fraternity to achieve some level of writing skills and interpretation of data. That will come only when we read anthropological classics. The “cut and paste” work has done our computer-savvy youths enough harm already. They need to read, and read good literature even if they do not relate to anthropology. It is only by reading good literature that good writing can happen someday because some of the qualities of good literature get internalized and come out when they write.

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