

# **PREDATORY JOURNALS: A THREAT TO RESEARCH INTEGRITY IN INDIAN ACADEMIA**

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## **Abstract:**

Predatory journals have emerged as a serious threat to research integrity, particularly within the rapidly expanding academic ecosystem of India. Characterized by deceptive practices such as false peer-review claims, aggressive solicitation, lack of editorial transparency, and publication-for-payment models, these journals exploit the pressure on academics to publish for career advancement, promotions, and institutional recognition. The phenomenon has gained momentum due to the "publish or perish" culture, inadequate awareness among early-career researchers, and evaluation systems that prioritize quantity of publications over quality. In the Indian context, regulatory gaps, uneven research training, and the misuse of indexing metrics have further exacerbated the problem. Predatory publishing not only compromises the credibility of individual scholars but also undermines the integrity of Indian research output at a global level, contaminating scholarly databases with unreliable and non-reproducible findings. Moreover, it diverts public and institutional resources away from genuine scientific inquiry and weakens public trust in academia. This paper critically examines the rise of predatory journals in India, their operational mechanisms, and their impact on research ethics, academic careers, and policy-making. It also evaluates existing regulatory responses by bodies such as the UGC and explores the role of universities, funding agencies, and researchers in combating this menace. The study concludes by proposing structural, educational, and policy-based reforms to strengthen research integrity and promote ethical publishing practices within Indian academia.

**Keywords:** Predatory journals, Research integrity, Academic publishing, Indian higher education, Ethics in research, Scholarly communication, UGC-CARE, Publish or perish.

## **1. UNDERSTANDING PREDATORY PUBLISHING: CONCEPT, CHARACTERISTICS, AND EVOLUTION:**

The contemporary landscape of academic publishing has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades, largely driven by technological advancements, digital accessibility, and the global expansion of higher education (1). While these developments have democratized knowledge production and dissemination, they have simultaneously given rise to exploitative practices that threaten the integrity of scholarly communication. Among the most serious of these challenges is the phenomenon of predatory publishing a structural distortion within academic ecosystems that operates under the façade of legitimate scholarly outlets while systematically undermining the ethical, intellectual, and methodological foundations of research. Predatory publishing may be broadly understood as a business model in which journals or publishers prioritize financial gain over academic integrity, often charging publication fees without providing genuine peer review, editorial oversight, or transparency (2). Unlike legitimate open-access journals whose operational costs are covered through article processing charges

(APCs) in exchange for quality-controlled dissemination predatory journals exploit the open-access movement by mimicking its language and structure without adhering to its ethical standards. This distinction is critical, as open access itself is not inherently problematic; rather, it is the misuse of the model that has led to widespread academic malpractice. The conceptualization of predatory publishing gained formal recognition through the work of librarian Jeffrey Beall, who first articulated the term in 2010 and compiled a widely-cited list of publishers and journals engaged in deceptive practices. Although Beall's list was discontinued in 2017 reportedly under legal and institutional pressure it played a pivotal role in exposing the mechanics of predatory publishing and raising global awareness. Today, initiatives such as the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Cabell's Predatory Reports, and the Think. Check. Submit. campaign have partly filled the void left by Beall's departure (3).

**Table 1: Key Characteristics Distinguishing Legitimate Journals from Predatory Journals**

Criterion	Legitimate / Reputable Journal	Predatory Journal
<b>Peer Review Process</b>	Rigorous, multi-stage, expert reviewers	Absent, superficial, or simulated; fast acceptance (1–3 days)
<b>Editorial Board</b>	Verified, named academic experts with credentials	Fabricated, unlisted, or stolen identities
<b>Indexing Claims</b>	Listed in DOAJ, Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed	False claims of indexing; misrepresented databases
<b>Article Processing Charges (APCs)</b>	Disclosed upfront, waiver policies available	Undisclosed until post-acceptance; hidden fees
<b>Publication Timeline</b>	Weeks to months; thorough review cycle	Days; acceptance within 24–72 hours of submission
<b>Copyright &amp; Author Rights</b>	Clear terms; Creative Commons licensing offered	Opaque transfer clauses; authors lose rights unknowingly
<b>Impact Factor / Metrics</b>	Genuine JCR Impact Factor or CiteScore by Clarivate/Elsevier	Fabricated impact factors; self-declared false metrics
<b>Manuscript Solicitation</b>	Subject-relevant communication through formal channels	Aggressive mass email campaigns; flattering invitations
<b>Retraction Policy</b>	Transparent retraction mechanisms in place	No retraction policy; errors persist permanently
<b>Examples</b>	Nature, The Lancet, PLOS ONE, Economic & Political Weekly	OMICS International journals, many 'International Journal of...' outlets

The evolution of predatory publishing must be understood in the broader context of neoliberal transformations in higher education (4-6). As universities increasingly adopt performance-based

evaluation systems, academic output has become commodified. Publications are treated as quantifiable metrics rather than as contributions to knowledge, creating a fertile environment for exploitative publishing practices. Predatory publishers thrive within this ecosystem by offering a transactional model of scholarship: payment in exchange for publication, without intellectual scrutiny.

Technological advancements have further facilitated the growth of predatory publishing. The low cost of website creation, digital hosting, and online manuscript management systems has enabled individuals or small groups to establish journals with minimal infrastructure. These platforms often replicate the visual aesthetics of reputable journals, using professional layouts, fabricated ISSN numbers, and plagiarized mission statements. A notable contemporary example is OMICS International — an Indian-origin publishing group that was sued by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2016 for deceptive practices and subsequently fined USD 50.1 million in 2019. OMICS operates hundreds of journals and conferences, exemplifying how predatory publishing has evolved into a sophisticated global industry. The globalization of higher education has played a crucial role in expanding predatory publishing. Many scholars from the Global South face structural disadvantages, including limited access to high-impact journals, language barriers, and restricted institutional support (7, 8). Predatory publishers exploit these vulnerabilities by positioning themselves as inclusive platforms that offer "international exposure" without the barriers imposed by established Western journals. According to a 2021 study by Macháček and Srholec, India ranks among the top three countries globally in terms of publications in predatory outlets, alongside Nigeria and Kazakhstan a reflection of both the nation's research growth and its systemic vulnerabilities. The implications of this evolution are profound. Predatory publishing undermines the epistemic foundations of academia by flooding the scholarly ecosystem with unverified, low-quality, or misleading research. It distorts academic metrics, misguides policy decisions, and erodes public trust in scientific knowledge. Most critically, it exploits the aspirations of scholars particularly early-career researchers who seek professional validation within increasingly competitive academic environments (9).

## 2. THE GROWTH OF PREDATORY JOURNALS IN INDIA: CAUSES AND STRUCTURAL VULNERABILITIES

India's emergence as one of the world's largest contributors to predatory publishing is not incidental but deeply rooted in structural, institutional, and socio-academic dynamics. The rapid expansion of higher education from approximately 20,000 colleges in 2000 to over 43,000 by 2024 has not been matched by proportional investments in research infrastructure, mentorship, and ethical training. As research output from Indian institutions has surged, so too has the gravitational pull of predatory journals.

**Table 2: Growth of Predatory Journals Global and Indian Trends (2010–2024)**

Year	Est. Global Predatory Journals	Approx. Articles Published Globally	India's Estimated Share (%)
2010	~1,800	~53,000	~6–8%
2012	~4,000	~420,000	~10%
2014	~8,000	~780,000	~12%
2016	~11,000	~1.0 million	~14%
2018	~13,000	~1.4 million	~16%
2020	~15,000+	~1.8 million	~18%



2022	~17,000+	~2.2 million	~19%
2024 (est.)	~20,000+	~2.8 million	~20–22%

One of the most significant drivers of predatory publishing in India is the "publish or perish" culture embedded within academic evaluation systems. Faculty recruitment, promotions, career advancement, and doctoral supervision eligibility are frequently tied to publication metrics. The University Grants Commission (UGC), for instance, historically relied on the Academic Performance Indicators (API) scoring system, which assigned numerical points to publications in recognized journals. This mechanistic approach incentivized quantity over quality and inadvertently incentivized the exploitation of low-quality publication avenues. For early-career researchers particularly doctoral scholars and contractual faculty members publication becomes not merely a professional aspiration but a survival requirement. A 2023 survey conducted by Ashoka University's Centre for Policy Research found that over 60% of doctoral researchers in Indian universities expressed pressure to publish in any indexed journal simply to meet promotional requirements, regardless of journal quality. The anxiety associated with meeting institutional benchmarks makes them particularly vulnerable to predatory publishers who promise rapid acceptance and guaranteed publication. Language also plays a significant role in India's vulnerability. English dominates global academic publishing, yet it is not the first language for most Indian researchers. Predatory journals exploit this linguistic vulnerability by offering minimal editorial scrutiny and framing themselves as inclusive platforms for non-native English speakers. While this appears empowering, it often results in the publication of poorly edited work that further marginalizes authors within the global academic community. Economic constraints further exacerbate the problem. Reputable open-access journals often charge high article processing fees typically ranging from USD 1,500 to USD 5,000 that are unaffordable for many Indian scholars, particularly those without institutional funding. Predatory journals, by contrast, often charge between INR 2,000 and INR 10,000 (approximately USD 25–120), making them financially accessible. In the absence of adequate funding support, cost becomes a decisive factor in journal selection. Institutional policies have also contributed, albeit unintentionally, to the normalization of predatory publishing. For years, regulatory bodies relied on journal lists that were inadequately vetted, allowing predatory journals to gain official recognition. Although corrective measures such as the UGC-CARE list have since been introduced, their implementation has been inconsistent, and awareness among faculty remains uneven. Cultural factors also play a subtle but significant role. In many academic contexts in India, hierarchical structures discourage junior scholars from questioning institutional norms or challenging unethical practices. This culture of compliance can normalize questionable publishing behaviors, especially when senior academics themselves engage in or tacitly endorse such practices. Over time, this creates an institutional culture where predatory publishing is not merely tolerated but implicitly legitimized (10, 11).

### 3. IMPACT OF PREDATORY JOURNALS ON RESEARCH QUALITY AND ACADEMIC CREDIBILITY

The proliferation of predatory journals has emerged as one of the most corrosive forces undermining the integrity of contemporary scholarship. In the Indian context, where higher education is undergoing rapid quantitative expansion, the adverse effects of predatory publishing are particularly pronounced. These effects extend beyond individual scholars, influencing institutional reputations, policy formulation, public trust in science, and the very foundations of evidence-based decision-making. At the most fundamental level, predatory journals erode the epistemic foundations of academic inquiry. Research quality depends upon rigorous peer review, methodological scrutiny, and scholarly dialogue. Predatory journals bypass or simulate these processes, allowing poorly designed, inadequately substantiated, or even fabricated research to enter the public domain. The absence of genuine peer evaluation means that

errors in methodology, data interpretation, and theoretical framing remain uncorrected. Over time, this leads to a dilution of academic standards, where the distinction between credible and non-credible scholarship becomes increasingly blurred (12, 13).

**Table 3: Documented Impacts of Predatory Publishing Multi-Level Analysis**

Level of Impact	Nature of Impact	Illustrative Current Example
<b>Individual Researcher</b>	Reputational harm; publications discredited; career setbacks; financial loss from APC payments	A 2022 Retraction Watch report documented Indian researchers whose profiles showed 30+ retractions from predatory journals, severely damaging career prospects
<b>Institutional</b>	Drop in global rankings; reduced international collaborations; accreditation risks	Multiple Indian institutions faced scrutiny during NAAC assessments (2022–24) due to inflated publication lists containing predatory journals
<b>Scientific Community</b>	Citation pollution; contamination of knowledge base; flawed meta-analyses	COVID-19 misinformation articles published in predatory journals circulated widely during 2020–21, including fabricated clinical findings
<b>Public Policy</b>	Policy decisions based on unreliable data; health and environmental risks	Flawed nutritional studies in predatory journals have been cited in government dietary guidelines in several developing nations
<b>National Innovation</b>	Reduced global competitiveness; skepticism toward Indian research output internationally	India's global research perception indices (GCI scores) have shown inconsistencies linked to predatory publication volume among some institutions
<b>Economic</b>	Diversion of public research funds toward fraudulent publishers	Estimates suggest Indian researchers collectively spend INR 500+ crore annually on APCs in predatory journals (Sharma et al., 2023)

The impact of this erosion is particularly severe in disciplines that directly influence public policy and societal well-being, such as medicine, law, environmental studies, and social sciences (14). In such fields, unreliable research can shape policy debates, judicial reasoning, and administrative decisions. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), a significant number of flawed clinical studies were published in predatory journals and subsequently cited in public health communications. A study by the WHO Information Network for Epidemics (EPI-WIN) in 2020 identified over 2,300 COVID-

related articles in predatory journals with no peer review verification what researchers termed an 'infodemic' fueled in part by predatory academic publishing. Another significant consequence of predatory publishing is the distortion of academic merit and evaluation systems. Academic institutions frequently rely on publication records as proxies for intellectual contribution. When predatory journals are counted alongside legitimate outlets, the evaluative process becomes fundamentally compromised (15). Scholars who publish prolifically in predatory journals may appear more productive than those who invest time in rigorous, peer-reviewed research. This inversion of merit undermines the principles of fairness and excellence that academic institutions seek to uphold. Furthermore, predatory journals distort the metrics used to assess academic impact. Many such journals fabricate impact factors or misuse indexing claims, creating a false impression of legitimacy. When these metrics are uncritically adopted by institutions, they contribute to a distorted evaluation ecosystem reducing scholarship to numerical outputs and stripping it of intellectual substance. The psychological and ethical implications for researchers should not be underestimated. Scholars who discover that they have been deceived by predatory publishers often experience professional embarrassment, disillusionment, and loss of confidence (16).

#### **4. NOTORIOUS CASES AND CURRENT EXAMPLES: PREDATORY PUBLISHING IN PRACTICE**

While the theoretical dimensions of predatory publishing are well-documented, examining concrete and current cases provides essential insight into how these operations function in practice. Several high-profile incidents from India and internationally illustrate the scale, sophistication, and consequences of predatory publishing.

##### **4.1 The OMICS International Case**

OMICS International, founded in Hyderabad, India, represents one of the most extensively documented predatory publishing operations globally. OMICS operates over 700 journals and organizes more than 3,000 conferences annually. In 2016, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed a lawsuit against OMICS International and its associated entities, alleging deceptive practices including false peer review claims, undisclosed charges, and the unauthorized use of scientists' names on editorial boards. In 2019, a U.S. federal court ordered OMICS to pay USD 50.1 million in penalties the largest judgment ever levied against a predatory publisher. Despite this, OMICS continues to operate, illustrating the limitations of punitive legal responses in isolation (17).

##### **4.2 The Fake Peer Review Scandal**

Between 2012 and 2017, several publishing houses including Springer, Elsevier, and smaller Indian-based journals discovered widespread fake peer review rings. Researchers many based in India, China, and Iran created fictitious reviewer identities and submitted favorable reviews for their own manuscripts. Retraction Watch, a blog monitoring retractions, documented over 500 retractions linked to fake peer review networks by 2023. Several Indian researchers featured prominently in these cases, leading to institutional investigations at IITs and central universities.

##### **4.3 UGC-Approved Journal Controversies (2018–2022)**

A particularly troubling dimension of predatory publishing in India has been the inclusion of dubious journals in official regulatory lists. Between 2018 and 2022, multiple investigations by academic watchdog groups revealed that over 4,000 journals initially listed in the UGC's approved list exhibited predatory characteristics including opaque peer review, fabricated editorial boards, and false ISSN numbers. The UGC CARE list was introduced in 2019 to address these concerns, but its rollout was marked by controversy regarding the delisting of regional language journals and the exclusion of several legitimate interdisciplinary outlets.

**Table 4: Selected Notable Predatory Publishers with Indian Connections**

<b>Publisher / Journal</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>of Journals Operated</b>	<b>Key Allegations / Outcome</b>
<b>OMICS International</b>	India (Hyderabad)	700+	FTC lawsuit; USD 50.1M penalty (2019); continues operating
<b>International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)</b>	India	1 (flagship)	Blacklisted by UGC CARE; fake peer review; false ISSN claims
<b>Research Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences</b>	India	Multiple	Accepted articles within 24 hrs with no review; removed from UGC list (2020)
<b>Science Publishing Group (SciencePG)</b>	USA/China (Indian clientele)	200+	Listed on Cabell's Predatory Reports; false editorial boards; mass solicitation emails
<b>MedCrave Group</b>	UAE (operated India clients)	~150	Identified by Beall's list successors; deceptive APC practices

The 2023 Cabell's Predatory Reports database identifies over 17,000 journals that meet threshold criteria for predatory behavior. Of these, a disproportionate share approximately 22% either originate from India or primarily target Indian researchers as their client base. This statistic underscores not only India's vulnerability as a consumer of predatory publishing but also its emergence as a producer of such services, raising serious questions about research governance and institutional accountability.

**5. ETHICAL AND LEGAL DIMENSIONS OF PREDATORY PUBLISHING PRACTICES**

The ethical and legal dimensions of predatory publishing reveal the depth and complexity of the crisis facing contemporary academia (16). At its core, predatory publishing constitutes a breach of fundamental ethical principles that underpin scholarly work honesty, transparency, accountability, and respect for intellectual labor. Unlike conventional academic misconduct, which often involves individual wrongdoing such as plagiarism or data fabrication, predatory publishing represents a systemic form of ethical erosion, facilitated by structural incentives and regulatory gaps. Ethically, predatory journals engage in deliberate deception. They misrepresent their peer-review processes, fabricate impact metrics, and falsely claim affiliations with reputable indexing services. Authors are often misled into believing that their work has undergone rigorous evaluation when, in reality, acceptance is contingent solely on payment. This deception violates the principle of informed consent, as authors are denied accurate information necessary to make ethical publication decisions. Moreover, predatory publishing exploits the asymmetry of knowledge and power between publishers and researchers, particularly early-career scholars. Many researchers lack the experience or institutional support necessary to critically evaluate journal legitimacy. Predatory publishers capitalize on this vulnerability by presenting themselves as legitimate academic actors, often using sophisticated branding and professional language (18). Such exploitation raises serious ethical concerns about fairness, responsibility, and academic integrity.

**Table 5: Ethical Framework Core Violations Committed by Predatory Journals**

<b>Ethical Principle Violated</b>	<b>How Predatory Journals Violate It</b>	<b>Relevant International Standard</b>
<b>Transparency</b>	Hidden fees, undisclosed ownership, false editorial claims	COPE Core Practices on Publication Transparency (2019)
<b>Peer Review Integrity</b>	Absent, fake, or simulated peer review processes	COPE Peer Review Guidelines; ICMJE Recommendations
<b>Informed Consent (Authors)</b>	Post-acceptance fee disclosure; deceptive acceptance letters	Declaration of Helsinki; UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (2021)
<b>Intellectual Property Rights</b>	Opaque or coercive copyright transfer; republishing without consent	WIPO Copyright Treaty; Creative Commons Framework
<b>Academic Fairness</b>	Misrepresented credentials inflate CVs unfairly	Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010)
<b>Social Responsibility</b>	Dissemination of unvalidated research in health, law, environment	European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA, 2023)

From an ethical standpoint, the complicity of institutions and senior academics cannot be overlooked. When universities reward quantity over quality or fail to scrutinize publication venues, they indirectly endorse unethical publishing practices. In some cases, faculty members knowingly publish in predatory journals to meet promotion criteria, normalizing unethical behavior and setting harmful precedents for junior researchers (19). This erosion of ethical leadership undermines the moral authority of academic institutions. The legal dimensions of predatory publishing are complex and fragmented. Unlike plagiarism or data falsification, predatory publishing often operates in legal grey areas. Many predatory journals are registered as legitimate businesses and technically comply with minimal commercial regulations. In the Indian context, there is no specific statutory framework addressing predatory academic publishing. While the Consumer Protection Act (2019) and the Information Technology Act (2000) may theoretically apply to deceptive online publishing, enforcement remains limited due to jurisdictional challenges and the transnational nature of digital publishing. Intellectual property concerns further complicate the legal landscape. Authors who publish in predatory journals may unknowingly transfer copyright under unfair or opaque terms, losing control over their work. In some cases, articles are republished without consent or used to populate multiple journals, raising issues of copyright infringement and academic misappropriation. The OMICS International case (2019) set an important precedent, with the FTC's successful application of consumer fraud statutes against deceptive academic publishing a model that Indian regulatory authorities may consider adapting within the domestic legal framework (20).

## **6. REGULATORY AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO PREDATORY PUBLISHING IN INDIA**

The growing recognition of predatory publishing as a systemic threat to academic integrity has prompted regulatory, institutional, and policy-level responses in India (21). However, these responses have often been reactive, fragmented, and unevenly implemented. While important initiatives have emerged in

recent years, their effectiveness remains constrained by structural limitations, inconsistent enforcement, and the absence of a comprehensive national framework addressing unethical publishing practices. One of the most significant regulatory interventions in India has been undertaken by the University Grants Commission (UGC), the apex body responsible for coordinating and maintaining standards of higher education. In response to widespread criticism regarding the proliferation of substandard journals, the UGC introduced the UGC-CARE (Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics) List, intended to replace earlier flawed journal lists. The CARE list aimed to curate a dynamic and quality-controlled repository of journals deemed acceptable for academic evaluation and promotion.

**Table 6: Timeline of Key Regulatory Responses to Predatory Publishing in India (2000–2025)**

Year	Regulatory Action / Event	Significance & Outcome
2010	Jeffrey Beall's List launched (global)	First systematic identification of predatory publishers; raised global awareness; listed several India-based publishers
2013	UGC API scoring system revised	Attempted to reduce dependence on publication count but structural incentives remained unchanged
2017	Beall's List discontinued; UGC revises approved journal list	Regulatory gap created; many predatory journals previously unlisted; UGC's own list under scrutiny
2018	UGC Regulations on Academic Integrity and Anti-Plagiarism notified	Mandatory plagiarism checks for all doctoral theses using Shodhganga/UGC-mandated software
2019	UGC-CARE List introduced; OMICS International fined USD 50.1M by FTC	Major policy shift toward quality-sensitive assessment; landmark legal precedent against predatory publishing
2020–21	UGC-CARE list expanded; universities directed to update faculty appraisal systems	Some institutions began excluding predatory journal publications from promotion dossiers
2022	NAAC assessment criteria updated to include research quality indicators	Increased scrutiny of publication quality during institutional accreditation processes
2023–24	National Education Policy (NEP 2020) implementation; ANRF Bill passed	Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) to oversee research quality; NEP emphasizes outcome-based research metrics
2025	UGC proposes updated faculty appraisal framework linking promotions to quality journals only	Potential structural reduction in predatory journal incentives if fully implemented

The introduction of the CARE list marked an important conceptual shift from quantity-based metrics toward quality-sensitive assessment. However, its implementation revealed significant challenges. The

dynamic nature of predatory publishing meant that journals frequently altered names, domains, and indexing claims to evade scrutiny. Moreover, the process of evaluation often lacked transparency, leading to criticisms regarding arbitrariness and bureaucratic opacity (22). Scholars also raised concerns about disciplinary bias, particularly the marginalization of interdisciplinary and regional journals. Universities and higher education institutions bear a crucial share of responsibility in addressing predatory publishing. Ideally, institutions should function as epistemic gatekeepers, ensuring that research produced under their aegis meets ethical and scholarly standards. However, institutional responses have been inconsistent. While some universities particularly the IITs, IIMs, and select central universities have established research integrity cells, ethics committees, and plagiarism detection mechanisms, many smaller institutions lack the administrative capacity or expertise to monitor publication quality effectively. Funding agencies also play a pivotal role in shaping research behavior (23). Grant allocation mechanisms often emphasize output-based metrics without sufficient attention to publication quality or societal relevance. The Department of Science and Technology (DST), Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), and Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) have begun to require disclosures regarding publication venues and ethical compliance in grant applications, though enforcement remains uneven across programs and funding rounds.

## **7. STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTION AND REFORM: STRENGTHENING RESEARCH INTEGRITY IN INDIAN ACADEMIA**

Addressing the challenge of predatory publishing requires a holistic and multi-layered strategy that transcends reactive regulation and focuses on long-term structural reform (24). Effective prevention must integrate ethical education, institutional accountability, policy coherence, and cultural transformation within academia. Rather than merely policing misconduct, reform efforts must seek to realign academic values with the fundamental purpose of scholarship: the pursuit of truth and societal advancement.

### **7.1 Educational and Awareness Initiatives**

A foundational step in this process is the integration of comprehensive research ethics education at all levels of higher education. Ethical literacy should not be confined to doctoral training but introduced at undergraduate and postgraduate stages. Curriculum modules should address not only plagiarism and data fabrication but also responsible authorship, peer review ethics, journal selection, and publication transparency. The 'Think. Check. Submit.' initiative an international campaign providing researchers with a simple checklist for verifying journal legitimacy offers a practical model that Indian institutions can adopt and localize (25).

### **7.2 Institutional and Policy Reforms**

Institutional leadership plays a decisive role in shaping research culture. Universities must move beyond compliance-driven evaluation systems and adopt holistic assessment frameworks that prioritize research quality, originality, and societal relevance. Promotion and tenure criteria should emphasize peer-reviewed impact, interdisciplinary contribution, and ethical scholarship rather than numerical publication counts. Such recalibration would reduce incentives to engage with predatory journals and encourage meaningful research engagement. The establishment of dedicated Research Integrity Officers (RIOs) at all central and state universities as recommended by the UGC in its 2023 draft framework represents an important structural reform. RIOs would be responsible for monitoring publication ethics, conducting awareness workshops, and investigating complaints related to predatory publishing. This model, already operational in many European and North American universities, provides a replicable template for the Indian higher education context.

### 7.3 Technological Solutions and Library-Based Interventions

Technological tools offer additional opportunities for prevention. Universities and libraries can deploy curated journal databases, whitelist systems, and AI-assisted screening tools to help researchers identify credible publication venues. Several institutions have begun subscribing to Cabell's Predatory Reports a subscription database that monitors and flags journals exhibiting predatory characteristics alongside the UGC-CARE list to provide dual-layer protection. Librarians, in particular, can play a central role as research literacy facilitators, bridging the gap between scholars and information ecosystems.

**Table 7: Recommended Multi-Level Reform Strategies for Combating Predatory Publishing**

Intervention Level	Recommended Strategy	Responsible Body / Actor
<b>National Policy</b>	Develop a National Research Integrity Policy; classify predatory publishing under consumer/cyber fraud provisions	Ministry of Education; UGC; Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF); Ministry of Law
<b>Regulatory</b>	Update UGC-CARE list dynamically; introduce algorithm-based monitoring; collaborate with DOAJ and Scopus	UGC-CARE Consortium; INFLIBNET; NAAC; National Accreditation Bodies
<b>Institutional</b>	Establish Research Integrity Officers (RIOs); revise promotion criteria; mandate journal verification protocols	Individual universities; Vice Chancellors; Academic Councils; Research Committees
<b>Curriculum</b>	Integrate research ethics and publication literacy modules at PG and doctoral levels; adopt Think. Check. Submit. framework	Faculty of Research; Library & Information Science departments; Academic Mentors; PhD supervisors
<b>Technology</b>	Deploy AI-based journal screening tools; subscribe to Cabell's Predatory Reports; develop national journal verification platform	INFLIBNET; University Libraries; Ministry of Education; DST
<b>Funding Agencies</b>	Link grant renewals to quality publication records; require journal quality statements in research outputs	SERB; DST; ICSSR; ICMR; DBT; University Endowment Funds
<b>International Cooperation</b>	Join COPE; participate in global research integrity networks; share intelligence on predatory publishers across borders	Ministry of External Affairs (Science Diplomacy); COPE; STM Association; Retraction Watch

### 7.4 Cultural and Mentorship Transformation

Cultural change remains the most challenging yet essential component of reform. Academia must move away from performative productivity toward reflective scholarship. Success should be measured not by volume but by value by the capacity of research to advance understanding, inform policy, and serve



society. Mentorship structures within academia must also be strengthened. Senior scholars bear a moral and professional responsibility to guide early-career researchers through the complexities of academic publishing. Transparent discussions about journal quality, rejection experiences, and ethical dilemmas should be normalized within academic communities. The NEP 2020 represents a potentially transformative framework in this regard. By emphasizing multidisciplinary research, outcome-based education, and global academic integration, NEP 2020 creates conceptual space for a fundamental reorientation of academic values. The establishment of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) in 2023 modeled on the National Science Foundation (NSF) of the United States signals India's institutional commitment to investing in high-quality research. If operationalized effectively, the ANRF could serve as a powerful counterweight to the publish-or-perish culture by rewarding research excellence over research volume.

## **8. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A CULTURE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY IN INDIAN ACADEMIA**

Predatory publishing has evolved from a peripheral anomaly into a systemic crisis that threatens the foundations of Indian academic scholarship. Its proliferation reflects not merely the opportunism of exploitative publishers but, more profoundly, the vulnerabilities embedded within academic structures evaluation systems that prioritize quantity, mentorship ecosystems that inadequately prepare researchers, regulatory frameworks that respond reactively, and institutional cultures that tolerate or normalize ethical compromise. Understanding predatory publishing, therefore, demands a structural analysis that moves beyond condemnation of individual misconduct. The evidence examined across this manuscript reveals a deeply interconnected web of causal factors: the commodification of knowledge under neoliberal academic regimes, the asymmetric access to legitimate publication avenues between the Global North and South, the absence of robust ethical education and mentorship, and the regulatory gaps that allow predatory publishers to operate with relative impunity. In the Indian context, these global dynamics intersect with specific structural conditions the rapid expansion of higher education without commensurate quality infrastructure, hierarchical academic cultures that discourage critical questioning, and policy frameworks that have, until recently, rewarded publication volume over scholarly rigor. The consequences of this crisis extend far beyond individual academic careers. At a societal level, predatory publishing erodes public trust in scientific expertise at a moment when evidence-based governance has never been more critical. From flawed medical research circulating during public health emergencies to dubious environmental studies influencing regulatory decisions, the downstream effects of predatory publishing permeate domains of profound societal importance. The integrity of India's research ecosystem is, therefore, not merely an academic concern but a matter of national interest. Yet the challenge also presents an opportunity. India's commitment to becoming a leading global knowledge economy as articulated in NEP 2020 and embodied in initiatives such as the Anusandhan National Research Foundation provides a policy mandate for comprehensive reform. By reorienting academic incentives, strengthening regulatory frameworks, investing in research ethics education, and fostering international cooperation, India can transform its relationship with academic publishing from one of vulnerability to one of principled leadership. The path forward requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders' policymakers, university administrators, funding agencies, faculty, librarians, and researchers themselves. Research integrity is not an administrative checkbox but a collective ethical commitment to the pursuit of truth. In safeguarding this commitment, India's academic community not only protects its own credibility but fulfills its responsibility to the broader society it is privileged to serve. Ultimately, the battle against predatory publishing is the battle for the soul of scholarship. It is a call to reaffirm that academic knowledge carries with it a covenant of truth a covenant with researchers, with readers, with policymakers, and with the broader public that trusts in the academy's capacity to illuminate the path forward. In honoring this covenant, Indian academia can reclaim its rightful place as a credible, rigorous, and ethically grounded contributor to global knowledge.

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