

POLICY ON INDIAN EDITIONS OF FOREIGN S & T PERIODICALS

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) is reconsidering the national policy regarding the publication of editions of foreign science and technology periodicals and magazines in India. This question has parallels in the problem India faced in building up its technology. To achieve self-reliance the policy pursued was: limit the imports of technology; raise customs barriers to protect our products; encourage developmental activities in Indian laboratories; etc. The policy had its successes but some persons were not sure whether any real progress was made. For example: with the passage of time, old, decrepit industrial processes continued to exist, defended by vested interests; industries did not form R&D groups even to absorb the imported know-how; no attempt was made to improve the technology or the products; nor was there any effective interaction between industries and Government-funded laboratories. So a decision was taken to permit imports of products and technology that would encourage a conscious improvement of quality so that our products could compete in the world market. The effect of this experiment is still to be properly assessed. (This is a good theme for later discussion in these columns.)

Following a similar path a decision was taken by the Government not to allow foreign science and technology journals to be published in India. More than thirty years have passed since then and so the Government wishes to examine whether a revision of policy is necessary. If foreign journals are published in India, there may be some saving of foreign exchange for us as we get many journals from abroad. But these journals will be published in India only if there is a market, which means profits to the publisher. More important, however, is the effect such publishing will have on Indian science.

Two opposite, extreme views are possible. We shall content ourselves with presenting them here. The first is that while we did have a sprinkling of really outstanding scientists before independence the general level of science and scientific research was increased only later mainly by the intense efforts of a growing and effective scientific community. Now that we are within hailing distance of being amongst the better ones in the world of science we must not do anything that will impede this progress. The publication of foreign science and technology journals in India may undermine not only the efforts to build up our own journals but even the formation of a cohesive and committed scientific community.

The other view is that if the scientists of India are to participate in the global scientific and technological activity they can do so only as equal intellectual partners. Any other stand would reduce us to a position of 'also-rans' so that we will always be followers, and so become scientific sub-contractors of scientists in advanced countries. Hence, if our scientific (and technological) activities have to be on par with international standards, we cannot and should not prevent the publication of international journals in India. The comparison of quality on home ground will egg us on to greater efforts of improving the quality of our science and of our journals.

One can therefore easily visualize the problems that DST will face in advising Government on this ticklish issue. The Department of Science and Technology felt that it may be appropriate to obtain the views of a cross-section of the Indian scientific community through Current Science. We are therefore bringing out the following questionnaire (see following pages) and earnestly urge our readers to return completed questionnaires to Current Science as early as possible.

—Editor

QUESTIONNAIRE—POLICY ON INDIAN EDITIONS OF FOREIGN S & T PERIODICALS

The Government of India's policy on the publication of editions of foreign science and technology periodicals/magazines in India since the mid-fifties can be stated as follows:

'So far as the ownership of newspapers and periodicals by nationals of other countries was concerned, the problem was not a very serious one. . . . No foreign-owned newspaper or periodical should, in future, be permitted to be published in India. The recommendation made by the Press Commission, that foreign newspapers and periodicals which dealt with news and current affairs should not be allowed to bring out Indian editions, should be accepted in principle. As far as the "specialized and technical" journals were concerned, the Government did not consider it appropriate to allow such publications.'

Please indicate your views on the following:

- I. 1. The present policy, of not allowing S&T magazines to bring out editions in India, is quite sound and ought to continue. I agree
 I do not agree
2. In scientific and technical fields, we will only benefit by allowing publication of editions of good foreign magazines/ journals in India since many more people, who do not presently have access to good libraries or similar other sources, will be able to get the latest information. This will not have any effect on similar indigenous S&T publications; in fact, it may help raise their standards. In any case, our own comparable magazines/periodicals, if they are any good, ought to be able to stand a little competition. I agree
 I do not agree
3. Our own effort in this area, i.e. Indian S&T magazines and journals, has not yet fully matured either in terms of quantity or coverage—largely because the number of S&T personnel even now constitutes only one per cent of our literate population. Allowing foreign magazines/journals to bring out editions in India will be deleterious to our indigenous efforts and may even result in undoing what has taken us many years of sustained efforts to build. If any exception is to be made, that ought to be done on a case-by-case basis after careful consideration of the corresponding indigenous effort, if any. I agree
 I do not agree
- II. Some specific suggestions:
1. Indian editions of journals like *New Scientist*, *Scientific American*, *La Recherche*, etc., which popularize some of the latest scientific work done outside India but which do not report original contributions. Yes
 Also in Indian languages
 No
2. Indian editions of journals like *Nature*, *Science*, *Naturwissenschaften*, which not only publish the latest original research and contain original scientific communications, but also discuss scientific discoveries, and present commentaries, news, views, etc. Yes
 No
3. Indian editions of journals from learned societies, academies and institutes containing original papers, like *Physical Review*, *Physical Review Letters*, *Journal of Molecular Biology*, *Journal of Solid State Chemistry* and journals in other subjects. Yes
 No

4. I recommend that Indian editions of the following journals be brought out:

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)
- (6)
- (7)
- (8)
- (9)
- (10)

5. I would like to add the following remarks/comments: (Please use additional sheets if necessary)

Name _____
Position _____
Address _____

Signature:

Date: