

DST questionnaire response analysis

Response to the questionnaire prepared by the Department of Science and Technology (*Curr. Sci.*, 58, 948) seeking views on the policy on publication of Indian editions of foreign S&T periodicals favours allowing Indian editions. The questions and results are given below. We also publish, in this and the following few issues, comments from some of the respondents.

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, 17%. I do not agree, 83%.

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, 83%. I do not agree, 17%.

3. Our own effort in this area, i.e.

Indian S&T magazines and journals, has not 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, 33%. I do not agree, 67%.

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, 85%. Also in Indian languages, 25%. No, 15%.

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, 91%. No, 9%.

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, 75%. No, 25%.

Some comments

[I assume that] the Indian edition would have exactly the same material as the original edition; the only difference would be that it will be (simultaneously) printed in India. (If it is not possible to print it simultaneously we can, perhaps, accept a lag of not more than one week.) It is, of course, also assumed that the price of the Indian edition would be substantially lower than that of the original edition.

P. M. Bhargava, Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad 500 007

Not allowing foreign science and technology journals to be published in India is to foster Indian science by 'protectionism'. This is a kind of scientific xenophobia and is against the very spirit of genuine science. Indian science has grown over the years and must be now robust enough to take on some 'comparison of quality on home ground'. Excellence must be able to stand out on any manner of ground. It is my firm belief that any further protection by exclusion will only help the rampant

scientific mediocrity in India to flourish further.

M. K. Chandrashekar, Department of Animal Behaviour and Physiology, School of Biological Sciences, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai 625 021

The idea of bringing out Indian editions ought to be to make them much cheaper, say approximately 1/5th the normal price. Otherwise, it is not worth the effort. *Chemical Abstracts* should be made much cheaper. Similarly, *Physics Abstracts* and *Biological Abstracts*. Cost of xeroxing, to be done by a central organization, should be brought down.

K. S. G. Doss, 8 Balaram Road, Adayar, Madras 600 020

(Prof. Doss passed away 18 October 1989. —Ed.)

1. Popular scientific journals certainly contribute to public awareness of advances in science and technology and the benefits accruing to society from the application of these advances. Also, such journals influence young minds to be aware of scientific advances and to

cultivate a scientific attitude. Western nations, particularly the US and the UK, handle this aspect in an appealing and inspiring fashion and therefore it would be an excellent idea to print Indian editions of the type of journals mentioned in Section II, paragraphs 1 and 2 [of the questionnaire].

2. Since science is international, quick and prompt dissemination of scientific discoveries is absolutely necessary to stimulate scientists in India to carry on their research purposefully and without duplication. To achieve this goal it may not be entirely necessary to print Indian editions of the journals of learned scientific societies. Since the demand for such journals would be confined to the particular university research departments, research institutes and research laboratories, journals such as those listed in II, paragraph 3 should be airlifted and made available to all institutions [that need them]. A special grant should be given by the government for this purpose.

3. Another useful thing would be to print a current contents list from important journals—with titles and authors—and distribute this list widely. At Bell Labs such a list is brought out

bi-monthly and is issued by the library and distributed to all Bell Labs scientists. This could be undertaken by a documentation center in a library that airlifts important journals. This would bring what goes on elsewhere to the attention of scientists. From this list they can go back to the journal itself.

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There is no substitute for a good library. This 'short cut' to reduce cost to make journals available to a larger section of scientists is likely to become more expensive to the country in the long run. This is a question of 'short-term gains' versus 'long-term loss'!

S. S. Jha, School of Physics, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Colaba, Bombay 400 005

Science journals are a source of knowledge. If science books are made in cheaper editions, why not journals? By not making journals available at low cost are we perpetuating disparities by making knowledge more expensive? Knowledge spreads by a chain reaction exponentially. The more we spread it, the more the 'chains' that will branch out in India. The damage from restriction will be great 'exponentially'.

S. S. Kalbag, Centre for Science Education Research, Pabal 412 403

We have had enough of scientific colonialism. If top scientists who hold prestigious positions of power still work at the bench and contribute compulsively to existing Indian journals, we can achieve a lot. We should issue a list of Indian journals which can hold their own against their compeers. Publication in any one of them should be treated as an essential requirement for recruitment of scientists/teachers. Government should subsidize regional libraries' subscriptions to Indian and international journals.

C. R. Krishna Murti, Susmita, 18/1 Third Main Road, Kasturba Nagar, Adayar, Madras 600 020

The most important aspect of any kind of research is access to information. In my opinion a sizeable chunk of money should be allotted to obtaining information. The only way for us seems to be

to reprint as many foreign journals as possible. I have personal experience where certain ideas were generated by reading totally non-related journals. A hallmark of many foreign universities, including CalTech, is that the libraries are full of journals from all over the world. I wouldn't be filling this out if CalTech was not subscribing to *Current Science*.

R. V. Krishnamurthy, 170-25, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena CA 91125, USA

An alternative to publishing Indian foreign journals, is to negotiate a special subscription rate for exclusive use within India. The publishers of foreign journals may be interested in an assured market if a certain guaranteed number of subscribers sign up. Some foreign publishers market some text-books under 'Not for sale outside India' condition. A similar arrangement may be made with regard to scientific journals.

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If India has to reach excellence in R&D at the international level, it is very essential to provide our scientists access to current international literature. Due to escalating cost of journals and reducing budgets, most libraries (particularly in the universities) are unable to provide important journals to their scientists. If we judiciously permit reprinting of selected foreign journals in India, it would help improve the overall standard of science and technology in India. In any case, the foreign journals are not going to cut into the market of Indian journals since they are not competing. We have to anyway buy the foreign periodicals, no matter how expensive they are, to provide access to research [published in them] to our scientists.

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1. We should start in a limited way with a few international journals of outstanding merit, like *Scientific American* and *Nature*, see their impact on Indian science, and then decide whether to continue/discontinue the practice.

2. A Hindi edition of *Scientific American* might be brought out as part of efforts

to bring science closer to a larger cross-section of readers in India.

J. V. Narlikar, Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Ganeshkhind, Pune 411 007

I would suggest that text-books by foreign authors *not* be published in India. We must give more time for our people to come up. It is also suggested that journals of foreign scientific societies *not* be published in India.

P. R. Pisharoty, Physical Research Laboratory, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad 380 009

To the majority of growing scientists the effect of availability of leading journals can be most positive. The fear that publishing foreign journals in India can weaken Indian journals is only a superficial fear. Secondly, foreign journals need not be 'specially printed' in India. By making proper legal arrangements with the publishers, photocopies of the journals can be supplied. The cost to be paid to the original publisher can thus be reduced. The task can be entrusted to INSDOC, for example. If the foreign publishers are asked to 'publish' their journals in our country, they can 'loot' us with their very high prices (which only a few can afford in India).

P. B. V. Prasad, Department of Physics, Government Polytechnic, Warangal 506 007

Special efforts are needed to strengthen Indian journals. The refereeing system should be more rigid and aim at excellence. Regularity in issue should be insisted upon. More attention should be given to printing and get-up, especially the quality of illustrations.

B. P. Radhakrishna, Geological Society of India, P.B. 1922, Gavipuram P.O., Bangalore 560 019

Many good papers by Indian scientists are sent abroad as they get better peer review and better exposure. Unless local journals attempt to have good reviews and circulation the current trend will continue.

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1. I think some formal arrangement for reproducing selected articles, news

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reports, reviews, etc. from *Nature*, *New Scientist*, *Science* in, say, *Current Science* is highly desirable, and also necessary. This will expand the range of quality information available to the non-elite in India (colleges, universities).

2. Most institutions are unable to subscribe to (m)any journals (II. 3 [of questionnaire]) because of the cost. The market is too small for Indian editions. Perhaps an affordable 'Third World' edition of some of the major journals will reduce the huge information gap within India.

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We should have our own scientific and technical journals reporting results of original research carried out in India. Even if it takes some time to grow in stature we need to nurture some of these journals on a selective basis (*a la* journals of the Indian Academy of Sciences).

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In order to achieve the national goals of self-reliance, economic growth and development, we need to exploit advances in science and technology worldwide. This is only possible if our scientists and technologists have free access to foreign S&T periodicals. However, these are quite expensive and, presently, a significant amount of valuable foreign exchange is being spent on their import. A substantial saving of foreign exchange is possible if we publish these in India. At the same time we should promote our own S&T journals by maintaining higher standards, and encouraging our scientists to publish good papers in these journals. Their distribution worldwide should be encouraged through the help of international societies or publishers (e.g. ASM International, Trans. Tech.). We should ensure that the papers appearing in these journals are abstracted widely (e.g. *Chemical Abs.*,

Metals Abs., *Ceramics Abs.*).

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We have learnt from experience that any restriction imposed will ultimately defeat itself and give more powers to the imposing authority, which is undesirable, especially in a scientific environment. We should minimize the restrictions imposed from above.

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1. That 'many more people, who do not presently have access to good libraries, or similar other sources, will be able to get the latest information' from Indian editions of foreign journals is a myth, because these are not going to be cheaper than the Indian journals, which are costly enough by themselves.

2. There is a real danger that the 'topics and areas of research' that our scientists, especially younger postgraduate students, will tend to pick for pursuing will be determined not by what India needs, but by what may be 'fashionable', 'current', or 'frontier' in other countries as projected by Indian editions of foreign journals/magazines.

3. After all, we don't allow a child to face the ugly realities of this world on his/her own until he/she comes of age and can take on the competition or challenges on more or less equal terms.

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The publication of Indian editions of journals from abroad will further invigorate indigenous scientific and technological R&D and may bring greater professionalism in quicker dissemination of new scientific knowledge. An open-ended policy may be adopted, without unnecessary limitations on publication of Indian editions. A start may be made with some selected bread-and-butter journals in priority areas of various

disciplines (e.g. *ASME Transactions in Mechanical Engineering*).

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There is no reason why our journals cannot achieve international standards. *Current Science* has shown this can be done. Our twin problems are the diffidence of good scientists in offering their good papers to Indian journals in the first instance and the deficiencies in our refereeing system.

M. S. Swaminathan, Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development, 11 Rathna Nagar, Teynampet, Madras 600 018

Individuals and institutions who wish to subscribe to top-class foreign journals are not too many; they should be assisted generously to subscribe to them. The foreign exchange outgo on this count will be small. The publication of those journals in India, on the other hand, is unnecessary and even harmful. I doubt whether such a practice is permitted in any country which hopes to build its own personality in world science.

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An alternative method of meeting the situation would be to select certain institutions representative of their subject, and give them assistance to set up photocopying sections. For example, the Geological Survey of India receives a large number of foreign journals. It could be given assistance to set up a photocopying section which would copy papers for those who want them at a reasonable cost. It could also list the titles of earth science papers published in foreign journals, and distribute these lists widely to S&T institutions and universities. This would be much cheaper than bringing out editions of foreign S&T journals in India.

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