

50 YEARS OF CURRENT SCIENCE—GLEANINGS

SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION IN INDIA†

A BIBLIOGRAPHY of scientific journals recently issued by the UNESCO contains nearly 200 titles of publications from India. A perusal of the list will show that the journals are quite extensive in range and cover almost all the important branches of scientific research. On the face of it, therefore, the position regarding scientific publications in our country might appear to be satisfactory; but in fact the situation does not warrant any such complacency on our part, for the vast majority of the journals are rather seriously handicapped by lack of proper finances.

At present, it is rarely the case that a society sponsoring a scientific journal is also in a position to meet fully the cost of its publication. The subscription rate has necessarily to be kept low so as to have a reasonable circulation, and the deficit has to be made up partly from advertisements, but mainly by subsidies from the Government. Some journals also receive grants from universities and other philanthropic institutions. While it is laudable that such support is available, it restricts the activities of the journal in many ways. Firstly, the grants are mostly made on an yearly basis only. Also, the continuance of the grants is never definitely assured so that any long range planning becomes difficult. Naturally, the selection of subject-matter for publication has to be decided not only by its quality, but also by the availability of space, which is restricted by financial considerations. Thus, many articles which would otherwise be perfectly suitable for publication have to be returned because of this factor.

A similar situation existed also in the case of the journals of the U.S.A., particularly on account of the heavy pressure on space due to the widely expanded research programme during and after the war. The solution which has been devised by them seems to be perhaps the best under the circumstances. Finding that the volume of matter deserving publication far exceeded their resources, the American Journals are charging a good percentage of the cost of publication to the institutions themselves who forward these articles, reprints being supplied to them free of cost. This solution seems to be perfectly just and reasonable, for it will readily be admitted that publication is an integral part of every research programme and any finance set apart for the programme should also include the cost of publication and reprints. In this connection, it is interesting to read the following statement by the American Physical Society: "It is gratifying that with few exceptions, the articles published in all American

Physics Journals now receive this institutional support which makes possible publication of a considerable number of pages of scientific material which otherwise could not appear." It hardly needs to be emphasized that a similar procedure, if also adopted in our country, would greatly improve the financial position of the journals.

Apart from these considerations, the introduction of such a procedure would also lead to various other improvements. One obvious defect that is noticed in many of our journals is that the quality of the articles accepted for publication is not as high as would be desirable. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a great tendency on the part of research workers to rush into print every new result, without waiting to consolidate the position. Also, where a paper is particularly good, a report of it is sent abroad for publication in preference to journals in India. This arises mainly from two causes; firstly, since the circulation of many of our journals is not large enough, an important contribution published therein is quite likely to be overlooked; and secondly, the time of publication is also long, and often not definite.

Under these circumstances, the suggestion that the institutions should pay for the cost of publication would go a long way towards removing these difficulties. Clearly, when the financial position of the journal improves the time of publication can also be made quite short, and this should induce good papers being sent for publication to journals in India instead of abroad. Once the standard of our journals is raised, there is bound to be a larger demand for them abroad and in this way the circulation would automatically shoot up. Further, if it is necessary to pay for the publication, there would be a preliminary selection of material at the source itself, so that the quality of the articles received for publication would improve considerably.

There is, however, a definite class of scientific journalism which is apparently unrepresented in India, viz., semi-popular expositions of scientific results, as in the *Scientific American*, *Science et Vie* or *Discovery*. This class of journalism has a vital role to play in keeping the general public abreast of the latest developments in science and helping them to take an active interest in its progress, which obviously is the only way of obtaining adequate public support for scientific research.

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