

Letter

About science communication in India

Partha Bandyopadhyay

Dear Editor,

This is in relation to the article "Science Communication in India: current situation, history and future development" by Dr. Marzia Mazzonetto published in *JCOM* 4(1), March 2005.

The article touches almost every aspect of Science Communication in India and will surely be very informative and useful for readers, especially those living outside India. But it contains a small number of factual errors and a few statements that may prove to be misleading to an uninitiated reader.

The purpose of this letter is to draw your attention to them.

Let us start with a small but significant slip in the non-scientific domain.

In the 5th page of the article (para 4) we read "... the Congress Party, founded by Sonia Gandhi, back to power ..." etc. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi is the present President of the party - but not one of its founders. The Congress Party was founded way back in 1885, long before she was born.

Next we come to the first page (para 2) of the article. We read:

"The most recent history of science communication in India dates back to the end of the Nineteenth Century, when the first science books imported from Britain were translated into the main local languages and distributed amid the upper echelons of society. It was only in 1947, the year India obtained its independence, that the first popular movements for science communication began to form".

Now, this account is not accurate and may create some wrong impressions.

The urban elite of 19th Century India knew and read English, and it was some of them who translated (or adopted) English books on science (as well as literature and other subjects) into 'main local languages' so that those not knowing English (which included people not belonging to 'the upper echelons of society') could assimilate them. And this started in early rather than 'late' 19th Century - in the 20's and 30's. As a point of reference one could mention the works of Raja Rammohan Roy (1772 - 1833), a polyglot, scholar and social reformer. He, among other things, translated books on geography and geometry into Bengali and also wrote popular articles on such subjects as "echo" and "magnet" in a Bengali journal named *Sangbad Koumudi*, which he himself edited, in early 1820's.^{1,2}

It may also be mentioned here that serious efforts for "popularizing" science were made even before India's independence in 1947, during the early decades of the 20th Century. To cite just one example - Nobel Laureate poet Rabindra Nath Tagore (1861 - 1941) ventured to write a whole book (*Visyaparichay*, published in 1937) on popular science which set a linguistic standard for subsequent science-writers in his native tongue - Bengali. (These are just a few examples from one part of India, which the undersigned is aware of. There must be many more from other parts as well).

It is true, though, what we now call People's Science Movement came into being only after independence.

May I conclude by saying that on the whole we found the article extremely valuable and wish to thank Dr. Marzia Mazzonetto for writing it.

With kind regards, yours sincerely
Partha Bandyopadhyay

Notes and references

¹ Nirmalya Bagchi, 'Rammohan Charcha', Suborno Rekha, Kolkata (India), 1995, pp 50-53. (in Bengali)

² Sushovan Sarkar, " Bengal Renaissance and other essays " , People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1970

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