

# India's Technology Dilemma

Computerization and an impoverished society

—REX WINSBURY—

*Rex Winsbury is former Features Editor of the independent "Financial Times" of London, from which this is adapted.*

The Indian printing and publishing industry is on the verge of a large-scale modernization program which promises a rich export market for British, American, and German suppliers of graphic arts equipment, but also promises to test the "appropriateness" of sophisticated technology for the Third World.

The challenge to India is to adapt Western technology and its economics to a different social environment so that jobs are preserved rather than reduced. In short India has to find a new, non-Western formula to blend technology, employment, economics, and politics.

If this effort fails it may simply drive the cost of Indian publications beyond the reach of the average citizen—thus denying the press a role in India's further social development. If it succeeds it will have lessons not only for the world's publishing industries, but also for everyone concerned with technology transfer between developed and developing countries.

Modernization also will test the nerve of the Government, which must permit the growth and reequipment of an industry that has not always been friendly to it, yet is essential to the democratic process and to the continuing spread of literacy. The Government may have to foster the manufacture of printing equipment of sufficient quantity and quality to offset the inevitable high tide of imports.

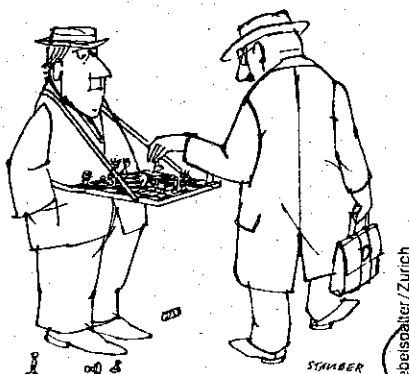
With at least 875 daily newspapers, 3,800 weeklies, and 8,500 other periodicals, India ranks as one of the leading publishing nations of the world. The country also has about 45,000 commercial printing concerns—a fivefold increase in thirty years. With the arrival in the past few years of good color presses, there has been a particular boom in new magazine titles, and titles in the Indian (as opposed

to English) languages.

The industry is still based on machinery and technology imported after World War II. This means that with prominent exceptions like the daily *Hindu* of Madras the industry still uses "hot metal" technology and the hand-set type that is disappearing from the U.S. and Europe. India has 130,000 hand compositors—probably more than the rest of the world.

The purchase of modern equipment in the West is often justified purely in labor-saving terms. But with an adult population of 326 million and an official urban unemployment rate of 15 million, the last thing India needs is labor-saving equipment. To avoid political and trade union backlash, such equipment will have to be introduced without loss of jobs.

Those who regard modern labor-saving photographic and computer-based printing techniques as "inappropriate" technology for helpless poorer countries point to further disadvantages. The equipment is designed for the large, multiple-edition newspapers of the West rather than for the smaller, single-edition papers of India and many other Third World countries. It also requires special isolated rooms with constant temperature, humidity, and dust-free levels — a difficult and expensive



"En passant!"

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matter in hot, rainy, dusty climates.

It demands a constant electricity supply, which Indian cities like Calcutta and Delhi do not enjoy, and special generating equipment is expensive. The new equipment also demands skilled maintenance—not yet available in India—and may be less durable than older composing and printing machines, which last twenty years or more.

The new technology will destroy some of the skilled printing trades that thrive in India, such as bookbinders' jobs and the work of calligraphers who write Urdu newspapers by hand. But it is impossible for the country to ignore worldwide shifts in technology such as now are in full swing in printing. Sensitive to having been something of a dumping ground for other people's cast-off machinery, India is not prepared to slip even further behind.

A new body, the Research Institute for Newspaper Development, has recently been set up in Madras to promote and "Indianize" the new technology. As V. N. Chubbra, Production Director of *The Statesman* in New Delhi, remarks, "We can walk on bare feet if we have to. But if we wear shoes, why should we put up with secondhand ones?"

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# Those who give and those who receive

India

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THE PRINCIPLE of foreign aid is admirable and a credit to the civilised concept of decent international relations but the way pragmatic politics are used to exert a dominant influence in the actual process of giving and receiving is not so commendable. In fact the more you examine it the more dubious it seems.

That, at any rate, is the main theme of this book written by a distinguished Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, Research Officer at the Overseas Development Institute, London, editor of the prestigious *South Asian Review*, and author of four authoritative books on various aspects of foreign aid.

It is somewhat chilling to have such detailed confirmation from such an unimpeachable source of what has been so long suspected, namely that what is blandly described as "enlightened self-interest" plays a powerful role in who gives and who receives. National spokesmen loftily orate about the moral imperative of the rich extending a helping hand to the poor but they are strictly selective behind the scenes in who they help and they expect, even if they do not always receive, political and economic considerations in return. It is also instructive to note from Mr. White's most informative book who does not get aid and why.

The largest countries in terms of size and population attract the attention of the major donors but all too often extraordinary contradictions cast a shadow over both givers and receivers. India is a prime example. It has been an important recipient of massive aid from both the USA and the USSR. Why? Because she has so persuasively and passionately held out her begging bowl and the two

## THE POLITICS OF FOREIGN AID, by John White (The Bodley Head; \$11.25).

by HERBERT MISHAEL

giants have taken a humanitarian pity on her plight? Not according to Mr. White. He regards the response from both major powers as a reflection of Cold War rivalry. Mother India occupies a key position by virtue of her size and population in the perspective of both powers, and such a country is of special significance in the global strategy of the Cold War.

Nor has the recipient of such gigantic aid escaped moral contamination. Despite the billions of dollars and roubles poured into India the bulk of the population is still well below the poverty line. I have visited India four times and I can say without hesitation that degrading poverty exists there on a scale that shatters the mind.

More than half of India's 500 million souls are still bracketed in the "starving" category. Hence the need for numerous "aid to India" programmes. Meanwhile the in-built conservatism and ceaseless pressures of wealth within Indian society and administration have grown worse with the passage of time. The power of the 50 families who own most of India's industry and investments has grown stronger. The Brahmin bureaucrats and the Brahmin homes of inherited wealth have flourished directly and indirectly as a result of foreign aid. That is bad enough in all conscience but what I cannot forget or forgive is the indifference born of familiarity with which the rich of India continue to treat the bottomless poverty of the masses. The callous contempt of the rich for the poor is nowhere in the world

more vividly illustrated than in India.

Ironically, India which has projected its image as a country destitute for food, has been spending millions of dollars on military hardware in a five year plan (1969-1974) designed not for economic advancement but for a mammoth military build-up. At least one-third of the total budget has been devoted to a gigantic "defence" effort. (Nations getting ready to wage war generally talk about "defence". Exactly what happened in 1970 when India went to war with Pakistan.) The battle on the food front is thus left to linger on like a cancer.

The ugly way in which foreign aid has been used to sustain reactionary regimes in some parts of the world and to encourage vain-glorious militarists in others to harbor ideas of coups to take over from vacillating chattering politicians shows how easy it is to violate the grand vision behind the original idea of lending a helping hand to the needy. Australia has been generous in extending foreign aid and ranks high in the list of givers per capita, but even in this country we apparently have military megalomaniacs who dream of a coup centred on Canberra judging by recent revelations in the ABC television programme *Four Corners*. Where would they get the money to finance their machinations? From overseas? From "foreign aid" in a new context?

In view of the exposure in this book of current aid practices of doubtful character why does the author persist in his faith as an advocate of aid and as a supporter of the politicians and administrators who strive for its continuance? His answer is that he cannot think of giving it up. He does not believe all aid has been beneficial and he does not believe the effort that has been put into increasing the overall quantity of aid in recent years was a wise strategy. It diverted attention from distinctions between different kinds of aid and from judgments about who actually benefited. He is not even wholly convinced that aid has on balance been beneficial to the recipients or that the true recipients have on balance been the poor who constitute the moral case's central concern.

But he is convinced that some aid has fulfilled its moral purpose sometimes, that the proportion can be increased, that it can be done without fundamental change of human nature or of systems of international relationships, that it is worth doing, and that trying to do something else would not in practice achieve any more desirable result. It is a splendid encouraging conclusion to a rather disillusioning book and its author deserves warm praise for maintaining his trust in an ideal as ancient as human reason and as original as the instincts of conciliation and self-preservation.