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**Library and Information Services to Social Science
Researchers: A Case Study from India**

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India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety and rich cultural heritage. More than a billion people live in a vast country. Its regions are dotted with different linguistic and socio-cultural groups and as a result, social science research which is concerned with human behaviour and inter-society relations, has become a complex phenomenon.

In the post independence period (i.e. after 1947) the country has recognized social science research as a necessary constituent of its development plan. M.N. Srinivas an eminent sociologist had said that problem oriented research could not be avoided in the light of the fact that international agencies and national government have become anxious to use social sciences for promoting development efforts. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), founded in 1969 as an autonomous organisation under the Government of India, is the apex body for the promotion of this activity; and the National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC), a division of the ICSSR, is primarily responsible for library and information related support services to the social scientists in India. As a corollary to this major objective, NASSDOC also aims to achieve bibliographic control over the vast myriad of social science literature that is published all over the country in a distributed manner. Major programmes of NASSDOC include:

- ❑ library and reference service
- ❑ literature search and bibliography on demand service
- ❑ preparation of abstracts and indexes of major Indian social science periodicals

- ❑ development of special collection for researchers comprising Ph.D theses in social sciences approved by the Indian universities and reports of research projects financed by the ICSSR
- ❑ compilation of an 'events calendar' incorporating details of forthcoming conferences
- ❑ 'Study Grant' or financial assistance to research scholars for collection of material from libraries and archives located in different metropolitan cities/towns of India
- ❑ document delivery service
- ❑ 'grants in aid' to undertake bibliography/documentation related projects or to do research in library particularly in areas like bibliometric study, information seeking behaviour etc.
- ❑ short term training programmes for the LIS professionals working in social science libraries to upgrade their skills and to develop basic library and IT related skills among social science researchers working in the universities located in remote areas and small towns.

The purpose of this paper is to present a circumspective view of some of these programmes and services with special reference to the efforts made by the NASSDOC and other agencies to achieve bibliographic control over Indian social science literature.

I. Library Service

Library and reference service of NASSDOC is meant for research scholars. The library has a collection of 5000 Phd theses and 3500 research project reports. It also has a reasonably good collection of bibliographic sources and other forms of reference material such as subject encyclopedias, directories, yearbooks, statistical compendium, research surveys, and works on research methodology/survey design etc. The collection is augmented by 12000 volumes of back issues of periodicals. NASSDOC has a mandate to preserve old issues of prominent Indian social science periodicals. The theses collection is extensively used by the newly registered doctoral students who want to familiarize themselves with the content and structure of a Phd dissertation. Moreover, as a national body, NASSDOC is also required to maintain a collection of documents that are specifically meant for researchers and normally not available in general purpose academic libraries. One part of this 'not easily available' sort of document is government reports which fall under the following four categories (a) administrative reports (or annual statement of working of an agency/government department) (b) statistical serials/publications (c) commission and committee reports (d) research report. Traditionally the government publishes thousands of reports every year. There is no bibliographic control over these publications and a majority of them remain confined to government offices. There are diverse practices in different agencies with regard to printing, distribution, and release of these documents, and this has generated a genuine

demand for bibliographic control and provision for better access to these publications. Users' surveys have revealed that social science researchers particularly those studying development related issues are avid users of these reports.

It has been found that there are uncoordinated fragmentary collection of government reports in most of the ICSSR supported 27 research institutions' libraries. The collection of the NASSDOC library is also fragmented. Keeping this in view, the NASSDOC has started a resource sharing initiative among prominent social science libraries. The purpose is to ensure the availability of reports and other forms of grey literature that are frequently requisitioned by the researchers.

II. Bibliography on Demand and Literature Search Service

Indian social science researchers are scattered all over the country in 227 universities and a few hundred autonomous research institutions. Libraries and documentation centres are largely concentrated in metropolitan cities like New Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Chennai; and in a few central universities/institutions of higher learning. In addition to these, Ministry of Culture has recognized certain prominent libraries as 'institutions of national importance'. The scholars staying in the large cities and nearby areas are able to consult their research collections. Where as others sometimes need auxiliaries like 'bibliography on demand' or 'literature search' from NASSDOC. A request for compilation of a bibliography or literature search (with abstract) is sent to NASSDOC on a particular subject. A literature search is normally made from indexing and abstracting databases that are available in electronic form. The service is provided by NASSDOC to the research scholar against a nominal payment. The purpose is to initiate them to research process.

Table-1

Requests Received for Bibliography on Demand and Literature Search Service by the NASSDOC			
	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Bibliography on Demand	193	185	126
Literature Search	126	137	97

The table shows that the number of requests for bibliography has decreased over the past two years. This could be primarily due to the availability of large number of bibliographical citations, library catalogues and contents page of periodicals on the Internet. Moreover, a major development that has occurred with regard to Indian social science literature is free availability of ISID database (i.e. Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi) which has an index of 126 social science periodicals published in India. Literature search service is mainly provided with the help of databases such as *Dissertation Abstract International*, *Econolit*, *International Political Science Abstract*, *Sociological Abstract*, *Social Science Citation Index* etc. It has been found that

availability of India related records and coverage of Indian periodicals in these sources is abysmally low.

Table-2

Bibliography on Demand: Topics on which Requests were Received by NASSDOC in the Month of March 2007.

- a. Sanamahi Religion in Manipur: A Sociological Study on Revivalism
- b. A Study of Urban Water Supply in Imphal, India
- c. child Labour
- d. A Study of Teaching and Learning English at Elementary Level in Haryana (State)
- e. Marriages in India
- f. Indo Pak Relations
- g. Problems & Prospects of Fishery Entrepreneurship in Chennai City
- h. Gender Inequality in Legal Profession-Special Reference to High Court of Indore and District Court of Bhopal
- i. A Comparative Study of Visually Impaired and Sighted Children in Relation to Anxiety and Adjustment
- j. A Survey of Engineering College Libraries and Their Users in S.V. University Area; Andhra Pradesh (State).

The list of topics shows that there are certain subjects (e.g. A Study of Urban Water Supply in Imphal) that are region specific and documents published by local bodies are somewhat relevant for the research scholars. A lot of effort is required to prepare bibliographies on such subjects; and quite often the researchers are advised to contact the local authorities such as Municipalities or Directorate of Education of the state for relevant data.

III. Study Grant/Financial Assistance to Collect Research Material or Data from Libraries/Archives.

Under this scheme, financial assistance is given to PhD research scholars in social sciences to consult libraries, documentation centres, archives and also to collect data from different places. One major objective of this scheme is to activate the use of library collections. The beneficiaries are entitled for a daily allowance of Rs.400/- and to and fro

rail fare from the place of their residences/universities to the cities where libraries are located. The allowance is given for maximum period of 20 days in a year. A special allowance of Rs.1000 is also given to the scholars to meet miscellaneous expenses like local transport, photocopy charges, library fee etc.

Table-3

Number of 'Study Grants' Awarded and Availed			
	2004-05 (April to March)	2005-06 (April to March)	2006-07 (April to March)
Awarded	41	60	116*
Availed	22	23	39*

*The figure for 2006-07 includes the application received at the Northern Regional Centre, ICSSR, New Delhi.

The table shows that there is a huge gap between the number of Study Grant approved by the NASSDOC to the research scholars and the number of grants actually availed. It has been found that research scholars particularly female students are somewhat reluctant to leave their place of residence for library consultation. Many researchers do not ultimately avail this facility after receiving the award letter. According to the existing rules, regular and serious scholars who are getting fellowship from the University Grants Commission are not eligible to apply for assistance under this scheme. This certainly reduces the number of applicants. However, the scheme is also operated by the six regional centres of the ICSSR for the students of the respective regions.

IV. Document Delivery Service

Document delivery service by NASSDOC is basically a 'follow up' measure of 'bibliography on demand'. Academicians/scholars residing at small towns and remote areas ask for full text version of papers/chapters of government reports and statistical serials for their research. The requests are generally received from the bibliographical records/abstracts supplied to them earlier by NASSDOC.

NASSDOC library sends the photocopies of articles mostly from the Indian publications to the research scholars against a nominal payment i.e. Rs.1 per exposure. The scholars are also advised to see the websites of government agencies for certain macro-level statistical data. In certain cases, books and published reports are acquired through the normal trade channel and supplied to the scholars against their special requests. The scholars also ask for a 'literature survey' on a particular subject/theme. In such case, a full text version of a 'review article' is sent (if available) and the researcher is advised to consult the theses collection of the library. According to the existing rules,

photocopies of PhD theses are not sent to the research scholars. The service is popular because in most of the academic libraries located in smaller cities and run by the state universities do not have even the complete volumes of Indian social science periodicals.

University Grants Commission (UGC) of India has recently started providing access to digital version of a large number of foreign periodicals in natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and other disciplines under the UGC-Infonet programme. As regards, the availability of Indian periodicals or more precisely India related material in the social sciences, the conditions are downward unsatisfactory. Only the recent issues of a few periodicals such as *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Sankhya*, *Social Scientist* etc. are available online for consultation. A few government bodies like the *Planning Commission*, *Reserve Bank of India (RBI)* have put their publications on their websites.

V. Short Term Training Programmes

NASSDOC organizes short-term training workshops for the LIS professionals working in the social science research institutions libraries. The purpose is to acquaint them with the on-line databases and various techniques of literature search. However, it has been found that some of the participants attending these workshops do not get an opportunities to apply their knowledge/skills at their workplace due to poor IT infrastructure. Training workshops are also organized for research scholars to enhance their 'information literacy'; or to motivate them to use library resources. The objective is to develop two fundamental building blocks of basic library skills and basic IT skills. The former may be deemed as a part of 'user education programmes' of special libraries where as the latter is a part of IT related training programmes for the use of electronic resources.

A recent workshop organized by NASSDOC for research scholars of University of Delhi, a premier institution of the country, has been widely acclaimed by the user community. The course curriculum included style manuals/standards for bibliographical citations; and search techniques to be employed for web-based information sources. The participants were of the view that such workshops should be organized regularly preferably in small groups belonging to the same discipline; e.g. economics, political science, sociology etc.

Moreover, informal discussions with the research scholars coming from different parts of India have revealed that there wide gap between the library facilities or services available and the awareness for these facilities among the recipients of these services. Many research scholars do not know how to compile a bibliography or how to search a book in a library with the help a scheme of library classification. This ignorance is widespread among the students coming from remote places. The prevailing conditions suggest that there should be an all out effort by a national body to conduct library literacy programme among the students.

VI. Bibliographic control over Social Science Literature

As a national body, the NASSDOC is expected to achieve bibliographic control over Indian social science literature that is published in different languages all over the country in a distributed manner. Now the question arises how do we define structure, scope and content of social science literature? Does it refer to literature or topics of interest to social scientists or literature normally used by social scientists? One can say that social scientists examine issues that evoke public and social discussion. Thus, social science literature is wider in scope. Many general works like biographies, historical narratives come under its purview. A large variety of written records such as newspapers, annual reports, memoirs, government records, personal correspondence and leaflets/election manifestoes are used by social scientists. In addition, oral evidence also plays an important role in social science research. Literature used by social scientists is apparently wider in scope than literature written by the social scientists.

Keeping in view the fact that bibliographic control is the major criterion, social science literature or literature used by social scientists for the purpose of study and research can be broadly divided into four categories:

- (a) Books and monographs; or the publications that are made available through normal trade channel.
- (b) Scholarly periodicals/peer reviewed journals that are included in indexing and abstracting sources.
- (c) National literature or works produced within the country; and
- (d) Non-scholarly literature or literature produced for non-specialists and general public.

The first and the second category; i.e. books and monographs; and scholarly periodicals are well covered in publishers' catalogues, national bibliographies, indexing and abstracting services. They fall under the 'organised sector' of social science literature. One of the most definitive sources for internationally known English language peer reviewed journals is the ISI publication *Social Science Citation Index*. Another source is *World List of Social Science Periodicals* published in 1986 by the UNESCO. It has been said that SSCI indexes more American and British journals whereas German and French social science periodicals are not as well covered. Bibliometric studies have revealed that SSCI indicators (i.e. impact factor of journals etc.) usually represent internationally oriented research. And except for the periodicals published in the USA and UK, national social science literature or country specific literature is largely excluded from the SSCI database.

As regards Indian social science literature, only two periodicals i.e. *Indian Economic and Social History Review* and *Contributions to Indian Sociology* were covered by the SSCI in 2003. The most important source for Indian periodicals' literature is *ISID Database*; compiled and published under the aegis of Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi. ISID is an ICSSR supported research

institute and it has electronically published an index to 126 Indian periodicals and 16 daily newspapers. The database also contains electronic full text version of certain important government documents such as (i) Union Budget Speeches (1990-91 to 2006-07) by the Finance Ministers of India; (ii) Economic Surveys – (General Review of Indian Economy), 1989-90 to 2004-2005; (iii) New and updated National Policies, Five year Plans and other important reports and documents; (iv) Key statistics on the Indian economy and global development indicators; and (v) Website addresses of important institutions and organizations.

NASSDOC, soon after its inception in 1970, started compiling retrospective indexes to Indian periodicals. Two regular publications *Guide to Indian Periodical Literature* published by Indian Documentation Service, Gurgaon and *Index India*, compiled by Rajasthan University, Jaipur were catering to the needs of Indian social scientists. A project was undertaken by NASSDOC in 1970 to compile two volumes containing index of articles titled (i) *Indian Education Index (1947-1978)* and (ii) *Index to Indian Periodicals: Sociology and Psychology (1886-1970)*. These two were published in the year 1980 and 1987 respectively by the NASSDOC-ICSSR. Another compilation, *Index to Indian Economic History*, a joint venture of the ICSSR and the Gokhale Institute released in 1965, is considered to be a reliable source on the subject. NASSDOC has compiled quite a few other bibliographical tools/research aids in the form of abstracting journals, surveys of literature, union catalogue etc. Even to day, no proper feedback on their use and value is available.

Social Science research programmes are influenced by national trends and by policy concerns of the national government. Moreover in contrast to science, social sciences are more embedded in their social context because society is their object of study. And as a result of this, social sciences become more region or country specific. Bibliometric studies conducted by the scholars suggest that both producers and consumers of social science information normally remain confined to their nations, and it has been also found that social scientists write for or read fewer foreign journals than natural scientists. Apart from various categories of government publications, project reports, occasional papers/working papers produced by different NGO's form a part of country specific literature. They are not made available to the libraries through normal trade channel.

Another type of region specific literature comprises non-scholarly works that are used by social science researchers. A large number of general periodicals, newspapers, biographies and books on current issues fall under this category. In addition, leaflets and election manifestoes released by political parties are examples of non-scholarly literature. These type of sources are not well covered by indexing and abstracting services and they do not earn citations. In most of the Indian States, there are a large number of non-formal academics who are not attached to academic institutions but have a keen interest in academic writings and debates. They are mostly the products of various social movements in which social scientists participate as public intellectuals. This interaction between the formal and non-formal academics has given rise to a plethora of journals in regional languages they mostly deal with local problems. A few local institutional

libraries compile indexes of these sources material for the consumption of their own research groups. The regional centres of the ICSSR located at Chandigarh, Kolkata, Shillong, Mumbai and Hyderabad have made sporadic attempts to achieve bibliographic control over these publications.

In recent year, attempts have been made by certain agencies to organise and disseminate geographical data and certain non-conventional sources of information. For instance, National Innovation Foundation (NIF), established in 2000 has created a database of over 60,000 grassroots innovation and indigenous knowledge practices. Of them, about, 150 are being looked at on a priority basis for product development, patenting and commercialization. Similarly, National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) aims to use Geospatial Information System (GIS) to provide data on water resources, flooding, rainfall, crop pattern, civic layouts to produce 3D digital maps. In the first stage, 40 major cities will be mapped and in later phases, the rest of the country. The NSDI network can superimpose all kinds of data onto a digital map.

VII. Concluding Remarks

Social science literature is a vast subject and it includes different types of sources in print and digital mode that are maintained by the libraries, and archives. It is not possible for a single library to function as a repository of all literature. Thus, NASSDOC has redefined its role and it is now functioning as a facilitating agency. The primary objective is to provide access to research information through print and electronic sources. NASSDOC has also initiated a project titled social science libraries network (SSLN) to promote resource sharing among prominent libraries of the country. As a national body, NASSDOC is required to cater to the needs of different groups that constitute social science research community in the country. Apart from university departments, there are NGO's, research institutions and other stakeholders. These groups are diverse in nature in terms of their proficiency in English and regional languages, skill in the use of computers and communications technology and use of research tools and techniques. Keeping this in view, NASSDOC is expected to retain some of its traditional services like bibliography on demand/literature search, document delivery, and study grant. NASSDOC has developed bibliographic tools that include abstracting periodicals, surveys of literature in different subjects, union catalogue of holdings of periodicals etc. There is hardly any feed back from the users' group in terms of their utility. Now, there is a need to undertake a study to ascertain literature growth and use pattern in social sciences in India.

Reading Resources

1. Chatterjee, Partha (2002), Institutional context of social science research in South Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 37 (35), p.3604-3612.
2. Goswami, P.R. (2003), NASSDOC's new initiatives. *ICSSR Newsletter*. 34 (2), p.17-18.
3. India a reference annual. 2007. New Delhi, Publications Division, 2007.

4. Indian Council of Social Science Research. Annual Report, 2002-2003. New Delhi, 2005.
5. Parekh, Harsha (1982). Social science literature, size, use patterns and bibliographical services. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 17 (35), p.1423-28.