

Doctoral Research in Library and Information Science in India: Some Observations and Comments

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This article gives a state-of-the-art overview of library and information science (LIS) education in India as a background to reviewing the doctoral research in the field. It traces the origin and growth of Ph.D. programmes in LIS in India and highlights the initiative and efforts of Dr S. R. Ranganathan (1892-1972). The article provides annual data on the quantitative output of LIS Ph.D. theses and ranks major

Indian universities by their output. It includes lists of the major areas of research and identifies some arid areas. The author laments the irrelevance and lack of use of research results in library schools and libraries. He attributes this to a low quality of research work because of a mindless proliferation of programmes and a lack of co-operation and resources for research.

The Structure and levels of LIS education

Professional higher education in library and information science (LIS) in India, now nine decades old, is centred in universities. Exceptions are two national institutes, namely, the Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC) in Bangalore, and the education section of the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC) in New Delhi. These two institutes concentrate on the training of professionals for special and industrial libraries and information centres. Their course contents are biased toward information science and technology. These two institutes are a class apart from other programmes in their environment and products. There are some regional library associations conducting certificate courses of a few months duration and women polytechnics offering post-masters two-year diplomas in library science to train para-professionals. At the university level, the Master's degree in library and information science is earned in two yearlong (or, in some places, four semesters) courses after 10+2+3 years of educa-

tion in any faculty. Of late there are two streams: the majority of the universities conduct two separate courses for the Bachelor's degree followed by the Master of Library and Information Science of one year (or two semesters) duration each. In recent years, some institutions have offered two years of integrated courses in four semesters. This integrated approach affords space for a cohesive and non-repetitive syllabus. Indeed syllabi in such schools are quite modernised. Students have the advantage that they do not have to re-seek and compete for admission to master degree courses. In some of the places admission to the Master's degree course could be a competitive ordeal.

Curriculum

The University Grants Commission (UGC), a statutory body to plan, co-ordinate, audit and partially finance (non-technical) higher education in India, has from time to time recommended the broader outlines of courses to be taught. The latest effort has been through a UGC Curriculum

Development Committee (1993). Every university being autonomous is free to frame its own course of studies. Debate has been going on whether we should go in for a uniform syllabus at least at regional levels. But there seems no obvious advantage to this drab uniformity. In fact there is no co-ordinating body to do this. Verbal pleas and repeated seminar resolutions to have some national level accrediting body (as the American Library Association in USA) have not borne fruit. The classes taught at the bachelor level are the library in society; cataloguing and classification (theory and practice); reference service and sources; library operations and management; and introduction to information systems and retrieval techniques. There are more variations at the Master's level. The basic set of courses includes universe of knowledge and research methodology; sources of information and bibliography in social/natural sciences/humanities, etc.; information retrieval systems and techniques; library systems in public/academic/special libraries; computer applications in libraries; and a small research project to be completed before the commencement of examination. In principle there are many optional classes available to the students. But due to the shortage of teachers most students have to opt for a topic for which a teacher is available. Syllabi are not very relevant and no worthwhile effort has been done at the national level to do research on the relevance of the curricula. There is an urgent need to widen the scope of studies available and to respond to the market forces.

Intake and teaching methods

There is always a rush for admission. The number of admission seekers is more than the seats available. This is despite the opening of many distance education programmes that rarely disappoint the admission seekers. But the intake of students is generally of poor quality. Library science courses are never the first option of the majority of students. Most of the students turn to library science after having failed to secure admission to other prestigious courses of study. Thus, it is a career of the mediocre at best.

Teaching is predominantly by the lecture method. In some central states, Hindi is also allowed as a medium of examination as a general policy of the state government. Only a few schools have

apprenticeship programmes for the students – otherwise classroom teaching with blackboard and chalk is the norm. Dictation of notes and their cramming by students are still popular. Neither class discussion nor questioning by students is encouraged. New methods of teaching are not tried. Use of educational technology in teaching is rather rare. It can be easily inferred from one of the recommendations of the 15th IATLIS Seminar (1997):

It is observed that [the] majority of LIS schools are lacking adequate infrastructure facilities to teach/train LIS students in IT. Hence it is recommended that the UGC should provide special financial assistance to develop adequate need-based IT infrastructural facilities in LIS schools.

Infrastructure

About a dozen universities have introduced the M.Phil. Degree, predominantly an intermediate research degree. During the last decade there has been a mushrooming of LIS courses available through correspondence courses or by the more respectable nomenclature of distance education. Except for one, most of such open schools are ill equipped for LIS education, though they have proved money minting machines for the parent universities due to higher enrolment. Some such schools do not have even full-time or regular teachers – good libraries or workshops are not even considered. There is always a cry for improvement or for closing of such courses – but they go on thriving.

Proliferation of library education

At present about 107 institutions, mostly university colleges and polytechnics, have library science education courses. Of these, the M.Lib.I.Sc. course is being offered by 67 universities; 11 universities offer the M.Phil. though this degree has no value in the job market. Today 32 Universities have Ph.D. research facilities (Handbook 1997, III). One University recently awarded a D.Litt. that it claimed to be the first such degree in library science all over the world. It may not be an odious comparison that up to 1986 only 38 universities had master programmes; and 18 universities provided doctoral research facilities though not all these 18 universities had master programmes

then (Kumar 1987, vii). The words of the eminent librarian, former President of the Indian Library Association, and former President of the Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS), P.N. Kaula, starkly hold true today. A decade ago, Kaula (1992, 10) said:

It has been observed that more and more institutions and libraries are opening library science courses without having even the minimum facilities for teaching. Even with poor libraries and funds they have started M.L.I.Sc. Programmes. In some universities there are not full time teachers to teach B.L.I.Sc. courses and yet some of them have also started M.L.I.Sc. programme. Open universities have also started [M/]B.Lib. Sc. programmes. Some private colleges have been conducting large number of C Lib. Sc. programmes with little or practically no facilities for books and libraries. This uncontrolled growth has brought down the standard of the courses. Library associations have also been having large intake of students without accessing the employment opportunities of the products.

Another problem with library schools has been a lack of public relations and marketing of their images and products. The late C. G. Vishwanathan (1990, 88), a veteran librarian, aptly wrote:

At present library schools and professional training centres in India are yet to receive a kind word from any section of the public ... Even the academic world still does not believe that there can be anything like education for librarianship and curriculum of studies for library science. But at the same time everyone wants library service to be first rate.

The Beginning of research in library and information science

The roots of research in our profession are not very deep. Research in library science is a twentieth century occurrence ushered in by the library school of the University of Chicago in mid-1920s. The visionary efforts of the Chicago School bore abundant fruit and offered leadership to the world in library science research (Shera 1976, 145). The pace of library research is picking up everywhere today due to social pressure as well as inspiration. In justifying the Ph.D. programme in our profession, it has been urged that "if librarianship aspires to become a profession, it should depend upon research to develop its knowledge base and its theoretical framework" (Wilkinson 1983, 39).

The Indian context

In India following British tradition and American precedent as established by Asa Don Dickinson (1876–1960), Librarian, Panjab University, Lahore, 1915–1916, library schools for advanced professional education have remained attached to universities. The growth of universities in Independent India ensured their constant growth. In a university, apart from teaching, a teacher is expected to do and guide research. The third function of a university, namely service and consultation, has always remained weak in India despite many newly established university-industry linkage programmes. (Mitra 1997, 1–4).

Ranganathan's work

The credit for the formal institution of the doctoral degree programme in library science in India goes undeniably to Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (1892–1972). In 1951, he started one at the University of Delhi surmounting many difficulties and facing personal ridicule. The University of Delhi awarded the first de jure degree in library science in 1957 to D.B. Krishan Rao who worked on a faceted classification for agriculture. Doctoral research remained in the wilderness when Ranganathan shook the Delhi soil off his feet in 1955. The Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC) in Bangalore, founded by Ranganathan in 1962, is technically not empowered to award the Ph.D. Therefore, for the rest of his life, from 1962 to 1972, Ranganathan only advocated solo and team research with stress on quality, relevance and basics. No big research projects were taken up at DRTC though individual teachers and students maintained both the quality and the tempo of research. Since the death of Ranganathan almost the entire DRTC faculty has earned Ph.D.s from other Indian universities on topics of research relevant to DRTC (Satija 1998, 80–87). Now the DRTC teachers are approved Ph.D. guides in many Indian universities, and they have already produced many Ph.D.s.

Growth of doctoral research in India

Elsewhere in India other individual librarians and library science teachers eager to earn doctorates were hampered by the non-existence of

programmes. In the 1960s and 1970s some doctorates on library-related topics were earned by library professionals from some other faculties such as sociology, history, law, economics, management, and the like. The mantle of reviving and furthering doctoral research facilities was assumed by J. S. Sharma (1924–1993), then the university librarian and head of the library science department of the Panjab University, Chandigarh. Under his guidance the second *de jure* Ph.D. in library science was awarded in 1977 after a gap of full two decades. Thereafter, there was no looking back. Many universities followed with mostly individual efforts and enthusiasm. Doctoral research got a fillip in the 1980s. India maintained its Third World leadership in library research as well as in library education and literature. Ph.D. programmes have rather mushroomed even despite the lack of facilities or adherence to standards.

Facilities for research

A conscientious university teacher is always in a dilemma over how to divide the time between teaching and research. Teaching is a primary compulsive and urgent duty to be performed. Students expect their teachers to give them time and personal attention. There may be appreciation in good teaching but the rewards lie in research. The university expects its teachers to do research for its prestige and fame lie therein. But when it comes to supporting of research many universities in India are neither generous nor unambivalent. Ordinarily piecemeal research, especially in social sciences, is not supported financially. Internal support for research trickles through a tedious and off-putting bureaucracy and political manoeuvring. Colleagues are un-supportive. They are unappreciative, intolerant and jealous. Library facilities are poor. Thus most of the teachers are driven to the passivity of guiding doctoral research instead of doing post-doctoral work.

The Deterioration of standards

The University Grants Commission (UGC) pre-conditions for faculty employment and promotions have prompted many library professionals to acquire Ph.D. degrees, though many may not

have the aptitude and the intrinsic ability to do research. Standards have not only been diluted but have been kept at abeyance. Supervisors and the examiners have become obligingly compromising. The cut-off date of December, 1992 (then advanced to December, 1993) for obtaining the Ph.D. degree to get an exemption from the (difficult) national level test for teaching jobs in universities/colleges has done incalculable damage to research standards. An eminent academician has corroborated the ill effects of this policy:

They were required to submit their theses before the deadline (December 31, 1993) regardless of the date of registration. Some of the candidates on whom Ph.D.'s were conferred were not fully acquainted with the contents of their dissertations. In some cases even the supervisors were innocent of any knowledge of what the theses were about. The incitement came from the UGC. (Kaul 1998, 7).

Programmes for Ph.D. research have been introduced and expanded mindlessly. As a result, there has been a bit of doctoral boom – a spectacular rise in Ph.D. awarding universities and awardees – though many institutions lack utterly the resources of people or material or both. A 1987 bibliography listed 41 Ph.D. theses written from 1957 to 1985 (Kumar 1987, vii). In a recently published bibliography of doctoral dissertations in India from 1950 to March 1997 about 340 titles have been listed (Sharma 1997). This record of 340 dissertations, though not wholly authentic, is reliable by and large. Its demographic distribution unveils an interesting picture:

Period	No. of theses	Year	No. of theses
1950s	2	1990	16
1960s	3	1991	26
1970s	8	1992	47
1980s	98	1993	28
		1994	41
		1995	32
		1996	33
		1997	24 *
		1998	11 *
		1999 (Up to May)	08 *

In productivity the Panjab University, Chandigarh, led up to the mid-1980s. Thereafter, it lost the number game to the universities of the south. The universities that have so far awarded up to ten degrees are ranked below:

Karnataka University, Dharwad	44
Jiwaji University, Gwalior	27
University of Rajasthan, Jaipur	26
Andhra University, Vishakapatnam	25
University of Delhi	17
University of Pune	16
Gulbarga University	15
Utkal University, Bhubaneswar	11
University of Burdwan	10

The universities in Bangalore, Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, and Nagpur University are picking up in research.

Relevance of research

In a developing country like India, there could not be a dearth of research problems to be investigated. But there seems a lack of perception to visualise and identify valid problems for research. A cursory glance of the topics worked on will at once reveal that the topics chosen do not have a problem or hypothesis but merely survey the state of the art or the existing conditions. The popular areas for research have been, in order of popularity: university libraries, bibliometrics, library use and user studies, information seeking behaviour, information systems, classification and indexing, special libraries, library history, reference service and sources, and library science education. Document selection and procurement, cataloguing, and experimental designs in library management are the least popular topics – though these seem practical and relevant to present day needs. That basic research is the most neglected area is endorsed by other surveys of doctoral research. (Lahiri 1996; Varalakshmi 1994). Library automation, library software, networking and information technology are just emerging. There is need to revive research in classification especially in context of OPACs, information networks and the electronic information environment in general.

The Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) on Library and Information Science (1992) of the University Grants Commission rehashed the importance of research, though it did not dwell at length on this aspect in its report. The blue document listed some areas for research, which are no less broad than the current courses being taught at the Master's level (UGC 1992).

- Structure and development of knowledge
- Classification, cataloguing and indexing

- Infometric studies
- Computer applications
- Historical studies
- Social and economic aspects of librarianship
- Library and Information management and systems analysis
- Applications of techniques of library and information science to evaluate other disciplines.

The list could have been more specific. Though not much revered, the report rightly lays emphasis on standards in research. It uncompromisingly asks for a clear declaration from Ph.D. candidates that the “work is based on the discovery of new facts by the candidate or the new relations of facts ... and how the work tends to the general advancement of knowledge” (UGC 1992, 107). While it is normally expected of every completed piece of research, yet it rarely happens. The evaluation process, however formal, is easily manipulated without qualms. Examiners are obliging on a reciprocal basis. In a small profession like ours this interplay of mutual usability comes in easily. It is often said jocularly (but understood seriously) that the degree is recommended more for the supervisor than for the candidate. And above all, we must admit that the library profession has failed to lure the best brains and even more to retain them. Mediocrity thrives; hypocrisy reigns. But this is not to overlook the genuine research and researchers.

Apart from not so relevant topics, theses have contributed little towards pushing the frontiers of knowledge; few are models of methodology. Indian library research seems to have no moorings in the prevailing realities. Topics are ideal, superficial and bookish. Even experienced librarians keen on earning the Ph.D. degree rarely come with an important problem for research. The supervisor who shies from controversial topics usually suggests the topic. Criticising individuals in formal black-and-white mode or exposing harmful tendencies of a class are not for them. Even a mild and healthy criticism is not tolerated in India. Feudal norms still lie deep in the Indian social ethos.

In addition, there is a dire paucity of data archives and reference works. Collecting data and information is considered a satisfactory end to the job – the goal of the research exercise. It is

very difficult to collect data by questionnaire in a vast country like India. Each researcher has a bag full of woeful tales to tell. Library associations at all levels seem to have washed their hands of the research responsibility. These do not even collect and compile statistics of the professional activities pertaining to their areas. Their libraries are poor. They have no research budget. For quite a time professionals have been talking, writing and conferencing about library education and research in India. Every year the Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS) holds a seminar on topics of library education and research. That it is the most popular topic with the teachers and librarians can be gauged from the fact that the FID/ET seminar was the largest of all the 49th FID (1998) pre-conference seminars held in India. The literature on library education and research is enormous, though repetitive and inflated. We have given lip service to the change of curricula and the raising of standards of research. But the needed change has not come through. The blame is wholly put on the lack of infrastructure and unavailability of funds. That is not the entire reason. The lack of effective collective efforts to safeguard the standards seems no less major cause.

The Contributions made by research

Contrary to expectations, dissertations are not fountainheads of the rest of the literature to grow and mature. These primary sources of information are distanced from relevance. The National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC, New Delhi) systematically procures one copy of each research dissertation in social sciences to preserve and make them available to researchers for consultation within the premises of its library. Retrospective bibliographies of LIS dissertations in India are available (Satija 1989, 71–78). The latest information on theses awarded, Ph.D. degrees and Ph.D. research in progress is available in the featured column of the weekly University News (1962+) of the Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi. It is a major source to keep track of the dissertations awarded Ph.D. degrees by Indian universities in all disciplines.

In spite of availability, other researchers do not adequately use these dissertations; nor are these works cited or quoted by teachers or textbook

writers. Working librarians rarely use research results to solve their professional problems. There is no precedent of a library inviting a library school to do research on a problem confronting them. (Conversely there seems inborn animosity and mistrust between them). At the risk of calling attention to a red herring, it is worthwhile to have this idea corroborated from a veteran library leader. Professor P.N. Kaula (1992, 9) candidly observed:

That LIS departments have little or no understanding and cooperation with the central library ... The problem is more psychological than academic ... Much harm has been done to the teaching of library science by the disharmony

Librarians go in for local, *ad hoc* and *pro-tem* solutions for their practical problems. Researchers consult a teacher or a fellow researcher for a topic of research rather than a practitioner. It is not only true in India but elsewhere too (Prytherch 1997). Thus research has become divorced from reality – a theoretical exercise at best. This seems a universal phenomenon in our profession. Carl Keren (1984, 137) doubting the value of research in information science daringly suggests that “It would be worthwhile to find out how much of it has really contributed to our body of knowledge and to the methods used by practitioners.” He himself understands that “We will probably be rather disappointed”. American teacher Margaret Steig (1992, 98) endorses this notion:

Research done by library and information science educators seems to receive little respect from professionals, and if they do not find it of value one has to wonder who will.

She further quotes (p. 98) the famous Conant report to prove her point:

Library educators seldom produce well-researched literary products ... This is where the library schools most fail the profession.

This is a time to pause and think, why? If we fail the practitioners and the scholars alike, whom do we serve then?

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Notes

- * This data has been collected by scanning the individual issues for 1997, 1998 and 1999 of the weekly *University News* published by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), New Delhi.