

Union catalogues of India

I have read with great interest the letter 'Updating scientific serials catalogue' by Kundu¹. Let me first give a brief history of the union catalogue in India. The credit for compiling the first union catalogue goes to Stanely Kemp, who in 1918 compiled the *Catalogue of Scientific Serial Publications in the Principal Libraries of Calcutta* (Asiatic Society of Bengal, now Asiatic Society). It was popularly known as *Kemp Catalogue*. Thereafter, Indian Research Fund Association (now Indian Council of Medical Research) compiled in 1938, a catalogue of serials in medical libraries. Efforts to revive the culture of compilation of catalogues were made by S. R. Ranganathan, the father of library science. In 1950, he compiled a pilot fascicule listing serials in mathematics and physics (Indian Library Association). This was followed by the publication of the *Union Catalogue Periodicals Publications in the Libraries of South Asia, Vol. I: Physical and Biological Sciences* (Indian Library Association, 1953) under the editorship of Ranganathan. No further volumes were published. The Indian Statistical Institute published the *Union List of Learned Periodicals in Calcutta Region* (1959). Ranganathan wrote the foreword. The Asiatic Society, compiled in 1962, yet another catalogue – *Catalogue of Scientific Periodicals in Calcutta Libraries*. These two catalogues, had merely listed the titles.

When B. S. Kesavan joined the Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC), New Delhi as its first Director, he decided to carry forward the work initiated by Ranganathan. The scope was, however, limited to

Indian libraries. The Document Procurement Section of INSDOC found that, for various reasons information provided in the existing catalogues did not reflect the actual stocks. Kesavan decided that the actual holdings of libraries should be verified. The entire operation was efficiently managed by Sambhunath Datta, who was associated with the project since its inception. Many of his colleagues volunteered to do this job on Sundays and holidays. I was then working in INSDOC. Kesavan also decided to decentralize the work and sought the co-operation of several state library associations. For example, when the task of preparing the catalogue for Calcutta libraries was assigned to the Bengal Library Association, the catalogue for Hyderabad libraries was compiled by the Academy of Library Science and Documentation. I was associated with this work. The result was the publication of a large number of union catalogues covering various regions of the country. And as stated by Kundu¹, the union catalogue is now available in hard copies, CDs, and also on the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi website. I understand that the listing had been updated till 2001.

Now Kundu had requested the 'scientific community and information professionals' to send the relevant data to NISCAIR. As stated above, unless the library stocks are verified, these catalogues would not achieve the desired results. The scientific libraries are no longer located in state headquarters. With the rapid increase in educational institutions in science and technology,

and the establishment of new level research institutions even in districts. It, therefore, involves verification of stocks of a large number of libraries spread all over India. The Ministry of Science and Technology should, therefore, make adequate funds available to NISCAIR to engage volunteers (students of library and information sciences) to do the job.

India is reasonably proud that it is the first nation to undertake the compilation of the union catalogue. In the West, the first such attempt was made in Great Britain, which resulted in the publication of *A World List of Scientific Periodical* in 1900–1933, brought out by the Oxford University Press. This was reviewed in *Nature* (20 October 1934). The fourth edition covering the period 1901–1960 in three volumes, was published by Butterworths during 1963–1970. It lists 50,961 titles. The *World List* is widely used as the source for standardized abbreviations of titles for scientific serials. The *World List* later become the *British Union Catalogue of Periodicals*, which also covers social sciences. It is updated every 10 years. In 1934, the National Central Library, Great Britain, compiled an edition of the *World List* which excluded the titles listed in the second edition. This was also reviewed in *Nature* (6 November 1937).

1. Kundu, S. R., *Curr. Sci.*, 2010, **99**, 268.

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Is Master of Philosophy worth pursuing?

According to the current University Grants Commission norms, holding a Master of Philosophy (M Phil) degree is not a necessity for a candidate to be able to join as a lecturer or an associate professor in arts and science institutes. This degree is not a mandatory requirement to enroll for a Ph D degree either. Most of those with a Master's degree (like M Sc, M A, etc.) complete their Ph Ds in the stipulated

time period without pursuing an M Phil degree. Is the M Phil degree valued in the higher education system in India? Knowing its current value, we suggest that the M Phil degree course should either be removed from colleges and universities or made an essential requirement for pursuing a Ph D course. But as a mandatory requirement it may further complicate the system with respect to

international standards. Instead, we should encourage courses such as an Integrated Master's and Integrated Ph D.

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