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# UNIT 8 SPECIAL LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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## Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Definitions
- 8.3 Special Libraries: Meaning and Purpose
- 8.4 Brief Historical Overview
- 8.5 Functions of the Special Libraries
- 8.6 Features of the Special Libraries
  - 8.6.1 Collection Development
  - 8.6.2 Processing and Organisation
  - 8.6.3 Services
- 8.7 Evolution of Information Centres
  - 8.7.1 Characteristics of Special Libraries and Information Centres
  - 8.7.2 Types of Information Centres
- 8.8 The Indian Scene
- 8.9 Summary
- 8.10 Answers to Self Check Exercises
- 8.11 Key Words
- 8.12 References and Further Reading

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## 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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Special libraries and information centres are a natural outcome of the need for information support to research and development, business and industry, expanded functions of governments and similar other organisations. This Unit introduces you to study their origin, growth and development and also their distinguishing features from public or academic libraries, with reference to their nature, scope, collection, services, etc.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- identify and describe the activities, functions and services of special libraries that are attached to different types of organisations; and
- explain the evolution and growth of information centres, and distinguish their specific characteristics with reference to their specialised products and services.

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous Units of this Block, you have been acquainted with different types of libraries like national, academic and public libraries with respect to their meaning, objectives, functions and services. In this Unit, you will be learning about the nature, scope, functions and services of special libraries and information centres.

While special libraries have been in existence since the beginning of this century, information centres emerged from the fifties and have now developed into a major group of information centres. They have overlapping functional characteristics. There are also considerable variations in the level of services offered by them. In this Unit, we shall study the origin, growth and development of these two major information institutions, such as Special Libraries and Information Centres - the functions they perform, the products they generate and the services they offer.



## 8.2 DEFINITIONS

Though the concept of Special Library is of a recent origin, a good number of experts have defined the Special Library. M.L.M. Harrod in his "Librarian's Glossary of Terms" defined that a "Special Library is a collection of books and other printed, graphic or recorded material dealing with a limited field of knowledge and provided by a learned society, research organisation, industrial or commercial undertaking, government department or ~even an educational institution. It may also be a special branch of a public library serving certain interests or occupational groups such as a technical library or a special subject library, meeting the needs of all enquiries on that given subject such as a music library". Broad field defined that "a special library is neither academic, commercial, national or public but it. intends to serve the needs of a portion of a community requiring detailed information on a limited subject field". The reputed library scientist D.J. Foskett defines a special library as "one serving a group, having an extra-library existence, whose members direct at least some of their activities towards a common purpose. This excludes academic libraries as their users pursue their individual ends, and are in no sense united by a Common Purpose". "The group served, according to Foskett, may be a government department, a professional association, an industrial firm, a research association or an institute or any similar organisation. Special libraries serve organisations with a clearly defined group policy, and members of the group have indicated their acceptance of this policy by the fact of their joining, which implies their recognition of a common interest". Dr. S.R. Ranganathan, a renowned Library Scientist prefers to call it as specialist Library to supply detailed information regarding some subject field - scientific, technical and otherwise.

## 8.3 SPECIAL LIBRARIES: MEANING AND PURPOSE

While other types of libraries serve multiple objectives such as education, research, recreation, cultural and social activities, the major and perhaps only objective of a special library, is the provision of information, in support of the objectives of its parent organisation. Special libraries exist in a wide variety of organisations, most of them being units of larger organisations. Their purposes are usually other than provision of education or conventional library services, invariably meeting the information requirements of the organisations to which they are attached. Special libraries are formed in research and development ' establishments, government departments, directorates, industrial and business undertakings, learned societies and professional associations, trade and business associations, hospitals and health services, social and welfare organisations, museums, national gallery of arts; etc. However special libraries are also established to serve a particular group of users or specialists working on a subject or a group of subjects or on a particular type of documents, etc. The following table illustrates these units:

Distinguishing Aspects	Special Library
Special user groups	Libraries for the Doctors, Entrepreneurs, Industrialists, etc.
Kind of activity	Nutrition (the Library of the National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad).
Specialising in a group of subjects	Food Science and technology (the Library of the Central Food and Technological Research Institute, Mysore). .
Type of documents	A film library; a video cassette Library; a manuscript library.

These distinguishing features identify special libraries although their functions do very often overlap.



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## 8.4 BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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Special libraries first began to appear in the United States (US) in the early decades of the 20th century. They were a new form of library, quite different from other types of libraries in their functions and purpose and in their new methods of collecting and organising material. In the later decades of the century, organisations increased in number, size and complexity, as business and industry began to grow rapidly. A large number of government organisations also sprang up to meet various activities of the government and libraries began to grow in all these organisations. World War I and II accelerated the process of industrial development backed by scientific and technological research. Research and development became increasingly institutionalised. This trend naturally led to the growth of special library collections and new services.

The growth of special libraries in Europe as well as in many of the developing countries also was modelled on the patterns of US special library movement: As nations continued to industrialise and increased their research, efforts, special libraries were established in research organisations and in other agencies. Growth and development of special libraries in India also has been on the model of the Western Countries.

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## 8.5 FUNCTIONS OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES

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A special Library is a power house for the generation, storage and use of information: It performs the following functions :

- collects, maintains, stores and retrieves information and data keeping in view the evolving needs of its parent organization;
- analyses, synthesizes and evaluates information and data;
- provides critical reviews, monographs, reports and/or collections;
- provides critical compilations;
- provides state-of-the-art reports;
- provides replies to queries;
- provides reprints, bibliographies and references;
- performs literature searches and translation services;
- provides abstracts, indexes and extracts;
- prepares accession lists, bulletins, news-letters; summaries, hand-books or manuals;
- disseminates current information and SDI and thus does stimulates research.

Besides these, it has some more functions to perform :

- establishes simple order record;
- reviews library's collections to build-up weak areas;
- establishes a monitoring system for the evaluation of performances.

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## 8.6 FEATURES OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES

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All the activities of a special library are derived from two basic types of information services that are provided by them. In fact, the reason for their existence, as stated earlier, is to provide such information services. The first service is provided in response to users' requests for information covering reference and literature search. The second is information service in anticipation of need and includes indexing, abstracting services which are designed to keep the users updated on new and current information. Decisions about collection development of the library, processing and organisation of documents appointment of staff etc. are made on the type and extent of services to be provided.



### **8.6.1 Collection Development**

Special library collections are working collections to support their information services, with an emphasis on current information and retrospective material, determined on the basis of the projects and programmes taken up by the organisations. Besides the traditional forms of material such as books, journals, technical and research reports, other typical and significant material include patents, specifications in scientific and industrial fields, business records, trade information and news clippings, etc. A particular feature of a collection in a special library is \*that it is never static, but dynamic and changing as new activities and programmes develop in the parent organisation. The library also gets affected by changes in the parent organisation and the scope and nature of the library collections and services also get changed suitably. Therefore, the staff of the special library must be constantly alert to possible new areas and the changing interests of the organisation so that the library collection and services can respond to changing demands of information. Generally speaking, the special library collections have three major components; the first is published information, the second internally generated information and the third, information available from sources, outside the organisation.

In most of the special libraries, periodicals provide the most updated information. Therefore, periodical collections are perhaps the richest of the library resources and the maximum funds are provided for subscriptions to periodicals. Specialised reports form the second category of published information. Information collected through newspaper clippings, pamphlets, statistical compilations, sales literature, trade catalogues, financial statements, government documents, etc., form the other sources of information.

The second major component of the collection is information generated within the organisation, such as, research reports, technical memoranda, laboratory note books, working papers, correspondence, house organs, newsletters, sales literature and company and competitive advertising etc.

Use of resource outside the organisation is the third component of the special library collection. Usually, the special library has to depend on external resources for information and materials outside its scope of activities. In fact, special libraries quite often use public, academic and research libraries through formal inter-library loan procedures.

### **8.6.2 Processing and Organisation**

Special libraries employ a wide variety of methods in organising their collections. The physical storage of its collection is determined on the basis of use. Catalogues, indexes, abstracts are prepared on the basis of ease of use, scope of the activities of the parent organisation and coverage. Classification, cataloguing and indexing systems also are simple in their design but are chosen to meet their requirements effectively.

### **8.6.3 Services**

#### **a) Reference Services**

Reference and research services range from answering simple reference questions to undertaking' complex research and literature services. Users are usually assisted in the pursuit of their own search for literature but quite often information expertise is made available in locating requested information and transmitting them in the most useful form. In fact, expertise is built into the special libraries' staff to handle complicated and complex problems of information handling. Some special libraries offer translation services either in house or obtain them from outside sources. In most of the special libraries, a close working relationship exists between the library staff and users to derive the maximum benefit from the library unit.

#### **b) Current Awareness and Routing Services**

Special libraries have developed a wide range of services to keep their users informed of new and current developments. Routing of current issues of periodicals is one of the most common functions of special libraries. The library periodically surveys its clientele as to which periodicals they wish to see on a regular basis, then circulates them to readers, as issues arrive. Current acquisition bulletins, indexes to current periodicals and title alerts are some of the different types of current awareness services provided by special libraries.



### c) Anticipatory Service

Besides these services, annotated lists, abstract bulletins, news summaries, digests or other types of anticipatory service are also provided by special libraries. In recent decades many of the special libraries provide computer based selective dissemination of information (SDI) service. In India SDI services are also provided but not necessarily through computers.

### d) Retrieval Services

Abstracting, indexing and preparation of digests are of paramount importance in special libraries. Special project and retrospective files are built up in special libraries for meeting their requirements on projects or requirements for new product or process development.

### e) Publication of Bulletins

The information about the new arrivals in the library are published in the form of acquisition lists or bulletins and supplied to all potential users: At times annotations are added to these entries. For some subjects, this service is available commercially:

### f) Personnel and Staff

In general, special libraries are managed by a small staff. One of the continuing debates in the field is whether a special librarian should be primarily a subject specialist or a library professional or both. But most of the controversies on this issue are getting resolved as persons with different subject expertise, are taking increasingly the special librarianship and documentation. Thus, the new breed of specialists are competent and have the expertise required to handle various activities of a special library.

### Self Check Exercises

- 1) List the nature of the collections in a special library.
- 2) List the services generally provided by a special library.

**Note :** i) Write your answers in the space given below.  
ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 8.7 EVOLUTION OF INFORMATION CENTRES

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We noted earlier in this Unit that the emergence of special libraries at the beginning of this century and their subsequent growth and development were due primarily to the need for library and information support for business, trade and commercial enterprises, research organisations and for various functions of government departments. These activities were intensified and expanded after World War II and were organised and operated through mission-oriented national research projects, innovative research for new product and process development, and vastly expanded activities and programme of governments towards socio-



economic development. As a natural consequence of these activities, information services are organised through specialised information centres with a new orientation and fresh approach. These centres which grew in different dimensions, were not necessarily tied down to any single parent organisation but were catering to a wider circle of users who were working in the fields in which these centres were operating. Thus, new types of information centres began to evolve and shape. Today we have a variety of such centres operating in diverse fields at regional, national or international levels.

These trends were initially witnessed in industrially advanced countries of the West in the fifties and sixties of twentieth century. These models naturally were influencing the development of specialised information centres in developing countries. For instance, in India, in 1952, a national documentation centre (INSDOC) was established to take care of documentation and information services required by the research community in the entire fields of science and technology. But in the next two or three decades, a number of specialised information centres, have sprung up as no single centre can any longer serve a wide spectrum of research activities.

#### **Definition of Information Centre**

*Harrod's Librarians' Glossary* defines Information Centre as being "usually an office, or a section of a bibliographical centre, research bureau or documentation centre, which gives information about books or on a subject with which the organisation providing the facilities of the centre is concerned. The functions of this centre include technical writing, indexing, abstracting, SDI etc., each one of intensive nature".

#### **8.7.1 Characteristics of Special Libraries and Information Centres**

The difference between information centres or information bureaus and many special libraries is one of degree with reference to the services they organise. Three functional levels of service are presently offered by these two types of information institutions. At the minimum level, the special library disseminates information and materials acquired by them, answers reference questions, directs users needing details on research information to appropriate source and handles routing of periodicals to keep their users informed of current developments in the field. At the intermediate level, a special library or an information centre, offers complex literature searches in specific fields, compiles extensive retrospective bibliographies, selects and transfers relevant research material in anticipation of demand, produces current awareness bulletins in specific disciplines, new products or new processes, or SDI, services based on group or individual profiles. At a higher level, an information centre offers highly specialised consolidation and repackaging services which involve analysis, synthesis and evaluation of information and present them in a form required by users. The final output may be a critical bibliography, evaluative and comprehensive state of art reports or a repackaged report for a specific user category, etc. In fact, this range of services has necessitated the formation of different types of information centres, such as data centres, information analysis centres and information dissemination centres. The higher level of information service requires staff with subject specialisation and communication abilities. However, these services can be offered by a special library, depending on their staff strength and material acquired and organised. A general difference between these two types of information institutions, is that while the special library offers services only to the staff of their parent organisation, an information centre often serves a widely distributed group of users whose only link being common subject interest.

#### **8.7.2 Types of Information Centres**

Information centres may be discussed under three broad major: groups, as given below :

- Data Centres
- Information Analysis Centres
- Information Dissemination Centres

##### **i) Data Centres**

Data is usually quantified information obtained through observation in scientific experimentation in laboratories or field surveys in the social sciences. These are normally



in numerical or non-numerical form and are presented in the form of tables, summary statements and in other special forms to the interested community.

Some examples of the types of data are given in the table below:

Type of Data	Example
Scientific	thermal properties of materials
Engineering	specifications of various commodities
Techno-economic	raw material available in a region, consumption data in a locality
Business	manufacture, sales, profits, losses, etc.
Industrial	types of industry, production capacity, licensing capacity, etc.
Manpower	skilled persons, employment potential, etc.
Socio-demographic	different groups of people in a region

A data centre is an organisation handling quantitative numerical or factual data, whose functions are to store collect, organise, analyse and disseminate data and provide various types of services on demand or in anticipation of demand. The services range from straight forward supply of data. with reference to any query to correlation and critical compilation of data pertaining to any field of study, presented in a tabular or graphic form. Regular abstracts and indexes are produced by the data centres pertaining to different disciplines and are made available in print or machine readable forms. There are data centres operating at local, national and international levels.

#### ii) Information Analysis Centres

Information analysis centres provide the most user-oriented information service, in a timely, authoritative and evaluated form, convenient to the user. In this service, the user wants the data and information contained in the literature and not the documents themselves. His needs are information collected from different sources and supplied in a form that could be used directly.

An information analysis centre is a formally structured organisational unit, specifically established for the purpose of acquiring, storing, retrieving, evaluating, analysing, synthesising, a body of information and/or data in a clearly defined specialised field. The purpose is to compile, repackage, organise and present pertinent information and/or data in a form most authoritative, timely and useful to a group of specialists.

The distinguishing characteristics of this type of centres are as follows:

The key activities of these centres are analysis, interpretation, synthesis, evaluation and repackaging of information for the purpose of enabling users to assimilate the information or numerical data of a specific field.

An information analysis centre- uses subject specialists to perform the analysis, evaluation and synthesis.

An information analysis centre I produces new, evaluated information in the form of critical services, state-of-art monographs, or data compilations and usually provides substantive evaluated responses to queries.

An information analysis centre provides assistance to a community of users and not just assistance to 'in-house' personnel.

#### iii) Information Dissemination Centres

During the last three decades another type of information centre has emerged whose primary function is to diffuse discipline-oriented information among its clientele. Such centres provide commercially available (-urgent awareness, selective dissemination and retrospective literature search services by searching Computerised data base. These centres may operate as units of organisation that produce the data base or may be offering these services as



independent organisations with proper connections with data base generators or vendors. Information dissemination centres differ from the other type of information centres in that their services are not geared to serve any specified group of users operating in any field or discipline. Rather, they offer literature search services to any group of specialist users, by searching any Computerised data base. These institutions are also known as information broker agencies, information consultants, etc. These trends are leading to the development of information industries which have now started operating in many countries, offering services from simple document supply service to most complex information analysis and consolidation services, charging a fee for such services.

To coordinate the activities of such centres and to promote research and recommend standards, etc., associations at the international level have been established.

- 1) The Association of Scientific Information Dissemination Centres (ASIDIC) originated in 1968 at Columbus, Ohio, USA. It is an association of information centres in the United States, Canada and several other countries.
- 2) A corresponding organisation in Europe is the European Association of Scientific Information, Dissemination Centres (EUSIDIC) established in 1970.
- 3) An Information Industry Association also has been established in the late 1970s in USA whose members offer a variety of information services.

The information dissemination centres, most of them being commercial organisations, have introduced an element of trade in the field of information services. Information marketing has thus become a subject of great interest and attention is given to economics of information with reference to buying and selling information products and services.

Information brokers are also slowly emerging in India, inviting young entrepreneurs to enter the field of information industry.

### Self Check Exercises

- 3) What is a specialised information centre?
- 4) Mention the key activities of an information analysis centre in about five sentences.
- 5) State in five sentences, the nature and scope of activities of information dissemination centres.

- Note :**
- i) Write your answers in the space given below.
  - ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 8.8 THE INDIAN SCENE

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India has been quite active in developing its special libraries and information centres in the last fifty years. In this section of this Unit, we shall give you a quick overview of the main





trends of current developments in India in this area. This section, however, has to be studied in conjunction with the other units wherein this topic has been discussed.

The trends witnessed in the industrially advanced countries of the West, influenced the design and development of special libraries, documentation and information centres in India also. Although India has been vigorously pursuing scientific and industrial research, backed by a positive government policy in the last forty years, special libraries had grown in India from the beginning of this century alongside research activities of organisations such as the Geological, Botanical and Zoological surveys, academic and professional institutions like the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, and government councils like the Indian Council of Agriculture Research and the Indian Council of Medical Research and similar others. However, it is only after the advent of freedom in 1947, that research complexes such as the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research began to be organised and research activities should to be established as institutional activities with government funding.

UNESCO actively promoted and provided technical assistance for the establishment of national documentation centres in many developing countries during the fifties and sixties. With the assistance of UNESCO, the INSDOC (Indian National Scientific Documentation Centres) was established in 1952 as a constituent of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

The next decade saw several special institutions and documentation centres coming up in specialised fields such as atomic energy, defence, agriculture, medicine, social sciences and similar others. In the seventies, with the establishment of National Information System for Science and Technology (NISSAT) under the Department of Science and Technology, sectoral information centres at national levels in fields such as leather, drugs and pharmaceuticals, machine tools, and food were established to meet their specific information needs. Today three more national sectoral information centres are in operation, offering specialised library and information services in textiles, chemistry and chemical technology. In addition there is a data centre in crystallography.

The nineties are witnessing national information system developing in environment, non-conventional sources of energy, ocean sciences, space, biotechnology, electronics etc., under various departments of government, constituted for promoting research and development. Besides these, public sector undertakings such as heavy electricals, steel; drugs and pharmaceuticals, fertilisers etc., are also establishing information centres in their respective fields.

In all these special libraries and information centres, most of the types of library and information services, mentioned earlier in this Unit, are being offered. A beginning has been made to modernise their library and information services using computer and communication technologies (in many of these institutions). This period is crucial for India as demands for information services would increase with information technology offering unlimited for integrating information systems and services. This will necessitate a more sophisticated institutional infrastructure for information services in the country.

### Self Check Exercises

- 6) Name the seven sectoral information centres established in India upto 1981 and give the short form and their location.

**Note :** i) Write your answers in the space given below.

ii) Check your answers with the answers given at the end of this Unit.

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## 8.9 SUMMARY

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In this Unit, we have :

- i) described the origin, growth and development of special libraries and information centres;
- ii) explained the functions of special libraries which are invariably attached to an organisation such as business and industry, research and development, or government departments;
- iii) pointed out the nature of the collections in libraries, their processing and organisation, the varieties of on-demand and anticipatory services;
- iv) described the evolution of information centres, their distinct characteristics as differentiated from special libraries;
- v) identified the three broad groups of information centres, describing their distinct functions and services; they are data centres, information analysis centres and information dissemination centres;
- vi) given a quick overview of the current Indian scene of special libraries and information centres;
- vii) presented a graphic summary of the operations of special libraries and information centres.

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## 8.10 ANSWERS TO SELF CHECK EXERCISES

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- 1) A special library collection is a working collection maintained to support its information services, with an emphasis on current information and retrospective material, determined on the basis of the projects and programmes of the parent organisation. The three major components of the collection are:
  - a) Published information available in books, periodicals, reports, etc.
  - b) Information generated within the organisation such as research reports, working papers, newsletters, sales literature, etc.
  - c) External information i.e., information collected from sources available from outside organisation.
- 2) A special library provides the following services:
  - i) Issue of documents, including inter-library loan
  - ii) Routing of periodicals
  - iii) Reference service
  - iv) Literature search
  - v) Current awareness
  - vi) Bibliographic services
  - vii) Referral service
  - viii) Selective Dissemination service'
  - ix) Document supply
  - x) Translation
- 3) A specialised information centre serves the needs of the persons within a special subject field, often inter-multidisciplinary in nature, providing comprehensive information based on needs, regardless of the location of documents. Such centres are directed to help scientists, technologists and others.
- 4) The key activities of an information analysis centre are analysis, interpretation, synthesis, evaluation and repacking of information for the purpose of enabling the users to assimilate better the information of a specific field. Specialists in subjects with communication abilities, present this analysis and synthesis. The final product of an information analysis centre contains evaluated information in the form of critical reviews, state-of-art monographs, data correlation and compilations.



- 5) Information Dissemination Centre offers customer-oriented information services by searching computer data bases of diverse subjects. This type of centre also known as information brokers or information consultants who charge a fee for the services they offer. The services these organisations offer may range from simple literature searches to the preparation of critical and comprehensive reports: These institutions are tending to become commercial, and are currently identified as one of the comportsing an information industry.
- 6) The seven Sectoral Information Centres are:

S.No. Name of Sectoral Centre	Year of Estb.	Institution and Location
1. National Information Centre for Drugs and Pharmaceuticals (hIICDAP)	1977	Central Drug Research Institute, Lucknow
2. National Information Centre for Machine Tools and Production Engg: (NICMAP).	1977	Central Machine Tools Institute, Bangalore
3. National Information Centre for Leather and Allied Industries (hIICLAI)	1977	Central Leather Research, Institute, Madras.
4. National Information, Centre for Food Science and Technology (NICFOS)	1977	Central Food and Technological Research Institute Mysore
5. National Information Centre for Crystallography (TTICRYS)	1981	Deptt. Of Crystallography and Biophysics, Madras Univ.
6. National Information Centre for Textiles and Allied Subjects (NICTAS)	1986	Ahmedabad, Textile Industry's Research Association Ahmedabad:
7. National Information Centre on Chemistry and Chemical Technology (NICGHEM).	1986	National Chemical Laboratory, Pune

## 8.11 KEYWORDS

- Consolidation** : Comprehensive account, descriptive or critical, reported separately or as journal articles, technical and research reports, conference papers, etc.
- Digest** : A publication consisting of summaries of information on a single topic or a number of related topics.
- House Organ** : A bulletin or newsletter of an organisation describing its current activities
- News Clipping** : A file of current events and activities reported in newspapers, cut and stored appropriately for retrieval..
- Patent** : A technical document containing descriptions of an invention and rating properly **right to the inventor by Government.**
- Processing and Organisation** : Classification and cataloguing of documents in a library and displaying them properly for use; include tools like library catalogues and similar others for public use.
- Products** : Indexes, abstracts, digests and others which are offered as finished products
- Repackaging** : Reports presented to suit a particular group of users.



<b>Services</b>	:	Literature search, supply of current references on a topic, supply of a copy of a journal article, translation etc.
<b>State-of-art Report</b>	:	A report on the development of a specific subject field or problem by consolidating the literature of a certain period.,
<b>Technical Report:</b>		A report concerning the results of scientific investigations or a technical development test or evaluation.

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## 8.12 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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