

39 Years of the Indian ISSN Centre: Evolution, Achievements, and Future Outlook

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Abstract

The Indian ISSN Centre is one among the oldest National Centres of ISSN which has successfully completed its 39 years in 2025. INSDOC, a premier institute in Scientific Documentation in India during 1980s was bestowed upon the responsibility of Indian National Centre in 1986. INSDOC was merged into new organization National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) on 30 September 2002 and then to National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (NIScPR) on 01 April 2021. Since its inception, Indian Centre has experienced many challenges in managing growing demands of ISSN and evolved itself through many technological developments. It received ISSN Award from the ISSN International Centre, Paris, France, in 2015 towards the commitment, consistent efforts and impressive achievements of ISSN National Centre, India. It faces a daunting task, from educating publishers to adopt fair practices in ISSN allocation to identifying predatory journals. The remedy to these problems came in the form of regulations implemented in mid-2010, which emphasize multiple identifiers and checkpoints. In addition, the Centre has successfully dealt with complaints from Indian publishers, and resolved positively cases brought by some publishers. Educating publishers, streamlining allocation processes and promoting the ISSN identifier have paid off, and in recent years the average number of ISSNs allocated has been rising in India. New policies implemented by the higher educational authorities and new act by Press Registrar General of India, which gives weightage for ISSN journals and relaxations for print publications, have shown positive impact on growth of ISSN in India. Statistical data of past 10 years show that demand for online ISSN has been more as compared to print format and language trend shows that English has been the most preferred language of publications. Looking at recent trends of growing demand of ISSN, after Covid-19 pandemic, it is projected that Indian Centre may cross magical figure of 1000 assigned titles in a single year.

Keywords: ISSN India, ISSN National Centre India, Indian publishers, ISSN identifiers

Introduction

The Indian ISSN Centre at the National Science Library (NSL) of CSIR-National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR-NIScPR, erstwhile NISCAIR), New Delhi is one of a network of over 93 National Centres worldwide and acts as a link between the Indian publishers & ISSN Network. Since 1986, NSL has been designated as the National Centre for assigning ISSNs to serial publications published in India. The Centre is also responsible for contributing Indian records to the world database of ISSN numbers, known as the ISSN Register, maintained by the ISSN International Centre in Paris. Journey that began by INSDOC in 1986, a premier institute in Scientific Documentation in India, has seen many technological revolutions for almost four decades and moved forward from one institute to other in CSIR but only thing that didn't change is National Science Library. Managing the growing demand of ISSN in developing and big country like India has always been challenging for all these years.

Genesis and Historical Evolution (1986–2010)

Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC), an institute under Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was a premiere institute within India during 1980s which was mandated to cater to information resources, information and library services and its dissemination. INSDOC began its operations from the present campus in 1983. INSDOC, one of the most appropriate organization those days was then entrusted as ISSN National Centre of India in 1986. ISSN Journey began in 1986 from the same INSDOC premises under National Science Library (NSL) which is also credited as one of the biggest Science library in India. INSDOC passing through one of its glorious era as a leader in LIS in India and having pool of library and information science experts in NSL which definitely has been the Indian ISSN Centre's forte for its successful functioning with dominance which continued for more than 2 decades till 2010.

The first Print ISSN assigned by Indian Centre was in January, 1986 to the serial Pratibuddha ISSN 0970-0005. From the year of 1986-2008, assigned ISSN records were transmitted to the International Centre on typed worksheets along with cover page and content page of the serials. From the year of 1986 -2012, ISSN and serials details were recorded in bound ledgers. From the year of 2009, Indian ISSN Centre started using Virtua client for transmission of ISSN records to the International Centre. This period also saw National Centre going to new entity called National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR) which came into existence on 30 September 2002 with the merger of National Institute of Science Communication (NISCOM) and Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre (INSDOC). CSIR-National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR-NIScPR), New Delhi came into existence on 01 April 2021 with the merger of NISCAIR and National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies (NISTADS).

Technological Advancements and Digitization (2010–2020)

In the year 2013, all ISSN ledger records were successfully automated and displayed on National

Science Library website to avoid duplication of records and facilitate public access. ISSN website was made operational for online submission of ISSN applications in 2015 with provision to check their status and search of assigned titles. All the ISSN allocated records of National Centre were automated and hosted on the website. Internal ISSN application was also developed for assignment and processing of ISSN application. Indian Centre is amongst the first few National Centers which started use of ISSN+ in place of Virtua. During Covid-19 pandemic, lock down in India impacted functioning of ISSN Centre so much that ISSN applications piled up for several months but Centre fought back strongly and with dedicated efforts from Indian ISSN Team, the service could be reinstated within few months.

The ISSN India Centre has received ISSN Award from the ISSN International Centre, Paris, France, in 2015 towards the commitment, consistent efforts and impressive achievements of ISSN National Centre, India (see Fig. 1 below).



Fig. 1: ISSN Award 2015 to Indian National Centre

Challenges and Policy Responses

Starting from educating the publishers on adopting fair practices for issue of ISSN to identifying predatory journals has been the arduous task for the Centre. The remedial to these came in the form of ISSN India guidelines (ref. 5) after its implementation in mid of 2010 which emphasize about multiplicity of identifiers, check points and its subsequent revisions. Moreover, the Centre has been successful in dealing with resolution of public grievances and legal cases. The impact of educating publishers, streamlining allocation processes and its promotion have paid off and for past couple of years, the average number of ISSN assigned has been rising again.

Same time, Indian Centre faced daunting tasks of dealing with predatory journals and handling growing number of applications (ref. 1). Indian Government have provided the very economical

and friendly online publishing platform for promotion of scholarly publications for the benefits of new academicians. For individual publishers who were enthusiastic to make their career in publishing, could do so with minimal financial support and small IT infrastructure and ultimately ISSN gave them the visibility at global platform. On the one hand this has brought very positive impact by attracting many beginners in publishing industry by publishing quality content as a startup but on the other hand this facility was also misused by few by bringing out low standards publications. Sudden spike in application for ISSN around and after 2010 was also due to the fact that University Grant Commission (UGC) of India introduced Academic Performance Indicators as credit points for teachers' promotion and recruitment in 2010 for articles published in ISSN journals (ref. 4). Many of these journals followed APC based open access journals models. Some journals failed on plagiarism check during ISSN allocation.

Another inevitable issues that recurs and had to be resorted on priority are court cases, complaints through right to information (RTI) act, grievances against publishers received by email/post and grievances registered on Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System of Government of India portal. In one of the recent court cases, the plaintiff made ISSN Centre as a party in a case filed against another candidate who got selected for a job because of credit points given to him for publishing article in ISSN journal. The plaintiff accused that the selected candidate had published plagiarized article in ISSN journal. The Indian Centre defended the case and was able to remove it as a party in this case after convincing the court that quality check is the responsibility of editor and/or publisher and ISSN Centre does not have any role to ascertain the quality of a serial/publication in any means. Sometimes authors raise their grievances against publishers for their fraudulent practices or presentation of misleading information about their journals. On few occasions, it is observed that few publishers tends to get annoyed by the ISSN Centre's requests for re-corrections before ISSN allocation and as publishers take their own time to rectify the issues, these causes delay in ISSN assignment and they represent it to higher authorities via redressal systems, RTI or by emails. Sometimes, false complaints are also made to higher authorities under the impression that they may get faster ISSN assignment to their titles. Publishers are also requested on few occasions to correct the misleading information about their publications.

Quality Assurance and ISSN Guidelines

Over the years, looking at the wider nature of complaints, problems in identifying fake journals and serving increasing demand for ISSN assignment from Indian publishers, it necessitated the ISSN Centre to come up and implement few regulations as pre-qualification to ISSN assignment so that only quality publications are allocated ISSN. Few identifiers which were picked up for quality check and were well documented in the form of ISSN guidelines (ref. 5) for better understanding of the publishers are explained below:

Identity with address proof of the publisher about ownership of publication is one such requirement that includes cross verification of signatures on the application against self-attestation on address proof. For print ISSN, it is mandatory for publishers to register their title with Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) first before applying for ISSN. This authority has stricter rules for registration with them. The Office of RNI coordinates with the licensing wing of the police department to verify the identity of the publishers. This step assures that the publisher's address

given at the time of applying is verified through the RNI process. Identity verification has been very successful in curbing fraudulent submissions.

Quality check of articles is the responsibility of an editor & publisher but even then ISSN Centre checks for plagiarism before ISSN allocation just to hold back predatory journals appearing in ISSN registry. Any article is randomly picked and checked for plagiarism and if the article is found as plagiarised, the ISSN is denied. It is also mandatory to have qualified experts in the editorial board and minimum of five Editorial Board Members are required for its constitution. ISSN are assigned only after endorsement of their titles by any two Editorial Board Members. This verification step is kept confidential from the publisher. There should be minimum of five articles in an issue and ten articles for annual publications. For online ISSN, valid website URL is required that should be linked to the institution/organization website. Displaying of misleading/false information in the website results in rejection of the ISSN. Also, changing of ISSN assigned Title without informing the National Centre results in revoking the assigned ISSN.

Policy Updates and the PRP Act, 2023

Last year, Indian Government came up with new act on registration of publications that came into force from 1st March 2024 (ref. 2). As per this act, journal of scientific, technical and academic nature does not come under the purview of registration with Press Registrar General of India (erstwhile Registrar of Newspaper of India – RNI) as per Press and Registration Periodicals Act (PRP Act) 2023. As mentioned in previous para about one of the identifier- registration of RNI for print ISSN, after relaxation in this act, it has been seen that the Indian ISSN Centre is receiving more applications for print ISSN. Very purpose of bringing this new act by the Government to promote scientific, technical and academic publishing in India is being fulfilled and this benefitted ISSN as it resulted in increased flow of application for print ISSN.

To control the inflow of ISSN applications & to assign ISSN to quality publications, Centre had adopted fair practices in identifying predatory journals and these regulations had been framed in the form of ISSN guidelines. These guidelines have been playing very active role in allocation processing and the publishers are immensely getting benefitted by useful instructions. Efforts are being put at the ISSN Centre on improving the contents of these ISSN guidelines by revising few identifiers like plagiarism check, fair editorial board constitution, removal of misleading information of publications etc. that will help us making processing of ISSN applications faster and same time to address issues related to court cases, grievances or complaints those revolves around making ISSN Centre responsible for quality related issues of the journal. Few identifiers like regularities in publications, sufficient number articles in an issue, functioning of website, complete serials volumes with archives on website are also examined.

On few occasions, when the ISSN applications are rejected due to plagiarism reports or misleading/incomplete information or non-functioning of website, the publishers do not accept these facts and even they try to hide and change these details on website. Therefore, all application processing staff at National Centre are instructed to keep records of error pages of websites and plagiarism reports. The step has been very helpful for the ISSN Centre to defend themselves from the escalated grievances or legal cases.

Statistical Overview (2015–2024)

Certain trend has been observed by Indian Centre for past 10 years during 2015-2024. Total of 7814 ISSN assigned during last 10 years. Yearly assigned ISSN records are analyzed based on following parameters:

1. Format- Print vs Online
2. Language Trends
3. Subject Distribution
4. State-wise ISSN Assignment
5. Application Inflow vs Acceptance

1. Format- Print vs Online

Last 10 years ISSN assignments shows that Publishers are highly inclined towards online medium (67.55%) as compared to print medium (32.45%). Except for initial 2 years, there has been constant & increasing demand for online medium as compared to print. The reason for growth of online ISSN may be due to simpler publishing norms for online publishing whereas print publications are required to be registered with RNI authority which has stricter rules. Due to relaxation offered to print publications in registering with RNI in early 2024, it is observed that demand for print ISSN has been increasing now.

FORMAT OF PUBLICATION FROM 2015 TO 2024												
Format/ Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL	%age
O	1026	825	396	358	507	236	317	460	494	659	5278	67.55
P	1438	313	200	121	203	41	32	51	43	94	2536	32.45
TOTAL	2464	1138	596	479	710	277	349	511	537	753	7814	100

Table 1: Format of publication from 2015 to 2024

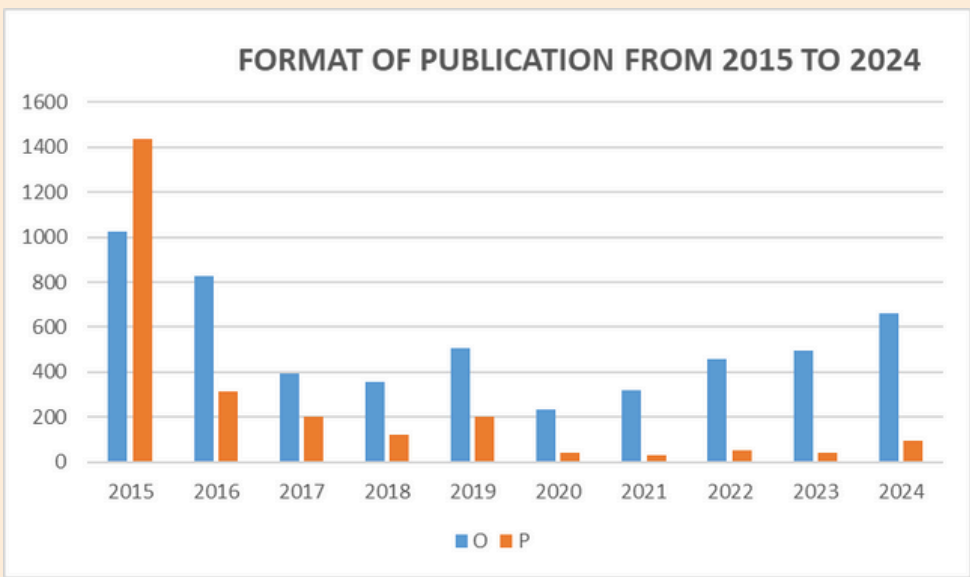


Fig. 2: Format- Print vs Online

2. Language Trends

India which is one of the largest country in population has multiple languages spread across different regions and it recognizes 22 official languages as listed in its constitution. Last 10 years trend shows that English has been the dominating language with about 74.42% share, followed by publications in multiple language with 13.94% and 3rd position by Hindi (4.54%).

S.N.	Language/ Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL	%
1	English	1632	881	431	391	554	216	282	427	417	584	5815	74.42
2	Multiple Languages	482	129	47	39	65	25	38	48	86	130	1089	13.94
3	Hindi	121	56	58	16	38	16	9	16	10	15	355	4.54
4	Bengali	94	15	9	7	10	5	1	5	3	2	151	1.93
5	Urdu	23	10	9	6	6	1	4	3	0	1	63	0.81
6	Tamil	11	8	6	2	9	4	6	1	4	3	54	0.69
7	Malayalam	19	5	6	0	4	0	1	2	2	6	45	0.58
8	Marathi	14	8	7	1	1	1	2	0	5	0	39	0.50
9	Telugu	3	5	5	6	7	4	1	3	0	1	35	0.45
10	Kannada	9	1	5	4	3	3	1	0	3	3	32	0.41

Table 2: Top 10 Languages of publications from 2015 to 2024

3. Subject Distribution

Titles with multidisciplinary subjects with 19.86% are leading the list of ISSN assigned during last 10 years, followed by medical sciences (16.42%), engineering (9.43%) and literature (6.45%).

S.N.	Subject/ Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL	%
1	Multi- disciplinary	322	155	135	121	147	81	82	143	153	213	1552	19.86
2	Medical Sciences	360	258	98	89	144	40	47	69	70	108	1283	16.42
3	Engineering	224	136	53	53	66	21	32	37	40	75	737	9.43
4	Literature	213	74	39	22	46	20	17	25	27	21	504	6.45
5	Social Sciences	188	61	26	22	27	9	17	19	29	41	439	5.62
6	Law	57	37	16	24	35	21	33	31	63	49	366	4.68
7	Management	79	44	16	36	36	4	9	20	21	27	292	3.74
8	Science and Knowledge in General	179	42	12	4	7	6	6	4	3	4	267	3.42
9	Computer Science	65	22	8	8	18	5	13	20	29	65	253	3.24
10	Agriculture	54	26	20	12	33	20	21	22	17	25	250	3.20

Table 3: Top 10 Subjects of publications from 2015 to 2024

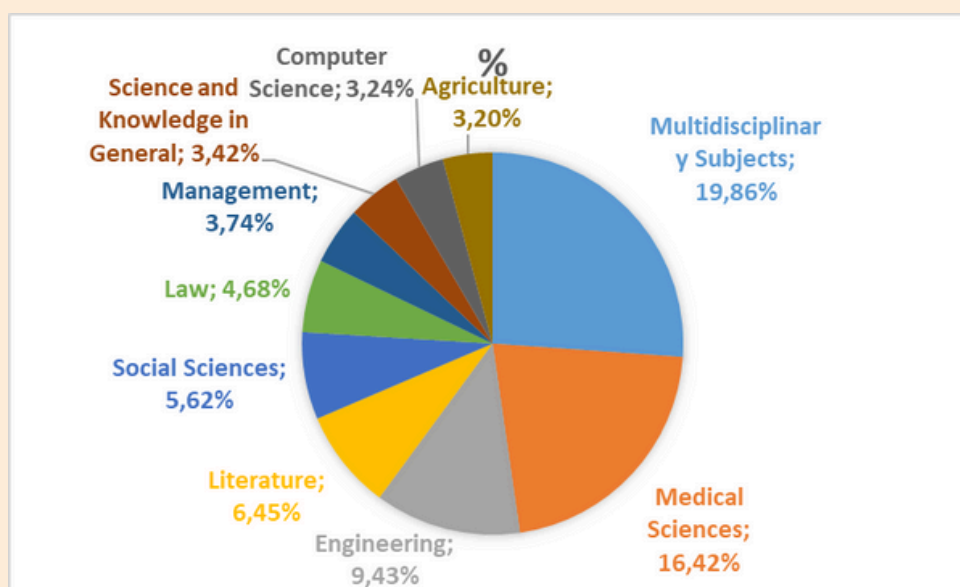


Fig. 3: Top 10 Subjects of publications from 2015 to 2024

4. State-wise ISSN Assignment

India has total of 28 states and 8 union territories. The ISSN requests has been equally distributed across India but largest state Uttar Pradesh has registered most ISSN followed by the capital city New Delhi. There are 6 metropolitan cities in India (Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Chennai) and all these big cities are part of top 10 ISSN cities. The trend suggests that urban areas has more presence in ISSN than rural areas.

S.N.	State/ Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL	%
1	Uttar Pradesh	322	160	80	64	126	41	46	73	79	205	1196	15.31
2	Delhi	277	198	128	66	112	36	39	70	50	89	1065	13.63
3	Tamil Nadu	216	93	51	31	69	23	36	62	98	83	762	9.75
4	Maharashtra	262	106	52	81	65	23	36	52	38	45	760	9.73
5	West Bengal	215	58	56	27	53	15	21	23	27	32	527	6.74
6	Madhya Pradesh	153	69	35	25	32	26	38	15	19	39	451	5.77
7	Karnataka	101	68	23	20	28	20	17	21	30	32	360	4.61
8	Rajasthan	79	51	38	17	31	13	13	20	16	30	308	3.94
9	Gujarat	110	43	23	19	22	6	13	22	24	23	305	3.90
10	Telangana	83	63	22	37	48	9	8	10	11	8	299	3.83

Table 4: Top 10 States of Indian publications from 2015 to 2024

5. Application Inflow vs Acceptance

Over the span of 10 years, Centre has received about 26524 applications and on an average 1/3rd of applications have been granted an ISSN. As seen for recent years, the number of ISSN being assigned is increasing every year and inflow of applications also growing. Centre is assigning about 781 ISSNs out of 2652 applications received per year.

(Assigned/ Received) / Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Assigned	2464	1138	596	479	710	277	349	511	537	753	7814
Received	3300	3283	3672	3749	2512	1800	2303	1862	1739	2304	26524
Assigned %	74.67	34.66	16.23	12.78	28.26	15.39	15.15	27.44	30.88	32.68	29.46

Table 5: Inflow- Assigned Vs Received applications from 2015 to 2024

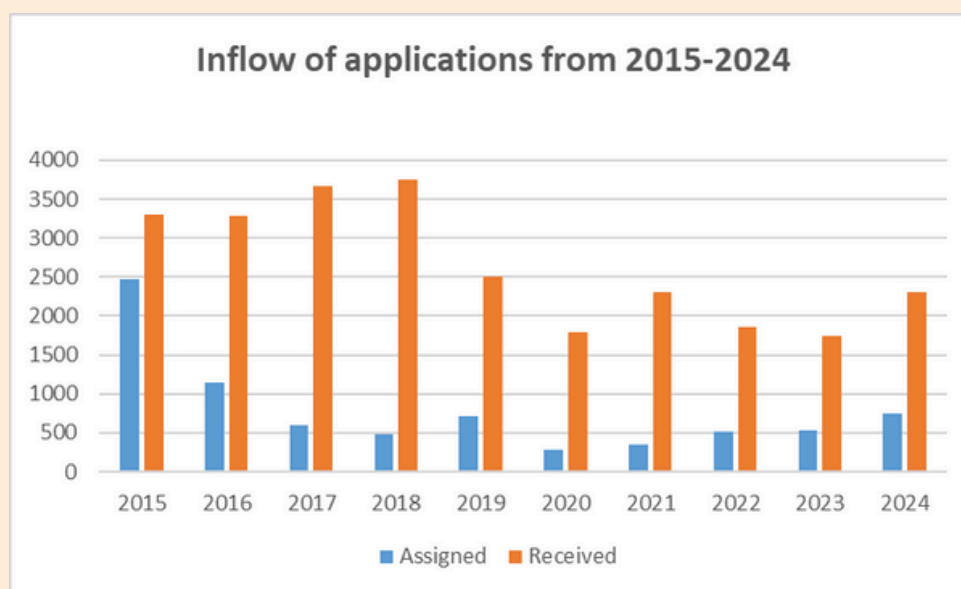


Fig. 4: Inflow- Assigned Vs Received applications from 2015 to 2024

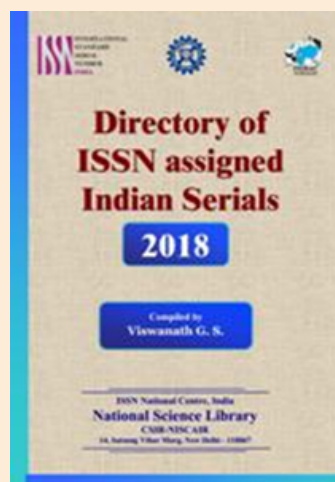
Institutional Outreach and User Support

To assist the publishers in presenting their content either on their website or in print medium, the ISSN Centre has come up with detailed information document for ISSN assignment which is in addition to existing ISSN guidelines. This document provides step by step instructions on how to present their content by giving different templates and sample examples. Detailed information document played crucial role in speeding up ISSN assignment process as publisher's website content improved and its accessing became very user friendly benefitting many readers.

Centre also promotes the activities of ISSN within India on different platforms like organizational events, workshops, conferences and seminars. The growing awareness about the importance of ISSN has resulted in innumerable queries. On an average 30-40 ISSN related queries are answered daily by e-mail/telephone. The promptness in answering the queries and assigning ISSN is very much appreciated by the publishers. Apart from the commercial publishers, there is an increase in demand for assigning ISSN from the Academic and Research Institutions for their academic and research journals. Well publicized ISSN services on our Institute's website as well as Institute's information Brochure has resulted in increased awareness about the ISSN activity and its importance.

Further, for the benefits of Indian publishers, ISSN National Centre, India has taken two initiatives-

- (i) Started publishing the "Directory of ISSN Assigned Indian Serials" since 2014 and
- (ii) Started issuing "Certificate of Registration" to ISSN assigned serials to the publishers on demand



University Grant Commission is an apex Government body in India. In supersession of the Public Notice dated 28th November 2018 for establishing UGC Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics (UGC- CARE), the Commission, in its 584th meeting held on 3rd October 2024, based on the recommendations of the expert committee, has decided to discontinue UGC CARE listing of journals and develop suggestive parameters for choosing peer reviewed journals by faculty members and students (ref. 3). The suggestive parameters, developed by a group of experts and academicians, are now placed in the public domain. Under journal preliminary criteria, the UGC has included ISSN as one of the parameter to ensure the peer-reviewed journals' quality, transparency, and relevance. Inclusion of ISSN as suggestive parameter for peer reviewed journal is going to be one of the driving force for growth of ISSN in India in coming days.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Journey of ISSN that started before 39 years has been very encouraging. The highest number of ISSN's were assigned in the year 2012 (3040), followed by the 2nd highest number of ISSN's in the year 2014 (2928). Like others, Covid-19 pandemic had impacted the progress of ISSN assignment but it got reinstated soon after it. Indian Centre assigned total of 26596 ISSN's to Indian publications during 1986-2024.

Indian Centre at its inception with many LIS experts to the current scenario with its limited manpower has gone through different situations and it still continues to handle growing demand and delivers ISSN services efficiently to the masses, in spite of digital divide in India. Its main focus has been to identify predatory journals and educate the publishers on adopting fair practices for ISSN. The Centre has been successful in dealing with resolution of public grievances and legal cases. The action taken in educating publishers, streamlining of allocation processes and its promotion has been very effective which is evident from the statistics of past couple of years, indicating the average number of ISSN assigned and inflow has been steadily growing. Centre is also working on revising ISSN guidelines by adding few identifiers for ensuring quality in publication and editorial board. More steps shall be taken for promotion of ISSN in India and on educating publishers on fair use. An internal workflow management system is proposed for automation of ISSN application processing for handling growing demand of ISSN along with

revamping of existing ISSN portal. It won't be an exaggeration if Indian Centre crosses magical figure of 1000 assigned titles in a single year starting from this year, a very special one- the 50th anniversary year of ISSN IC.

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