

## Impact Outlook

- 'ICSSR is making a serious effort to identify the existing research gaps, emerging social issues and studies in those issues by sincere scholars, as well as urging scholars to correlate social science research (SSR) proposals and findings with the needs of the society and policy making'
- 'Indian social science scholars have the required talent to make a better contribution and this could be done through improved training, exposure and sensitisation about the needs of highly rated journals. International collaborations and joint researches would be of great help in this pursuit for dissemination at international level'

# Creating a solid future for Indian Social Sciences

*Professor V K Malhotra, Member Secretary of Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) shares his thoughts on the work of the Council to promote, fund and provide direction to social science research and research institutes, as well as how to disseminate the knowledge gained through these efforts*

### Can you outline what led to ICSSR being set up?

The establishment of Planning Commission in 1950 gave a big boost to social science research (SSR) in India. The Planning Commission set up the Research Programmes Committee (RPC) in 1953 to support SSR in relevant disciplines that could deal with social, economic and administrative concerns. In 1964, the Government of India set up the Second Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Professor D S Kothari which recognised SSR as one of the important contributors to social development. It emphasised that the teaching in science cannot be enriched without the inclusion of some elements of social sciences and humanities.

The Government set up another Committee for SSR under the Chairmanship of Professor V K R V Rao in 1965 to survey the then status of SSR in the country and to make recommendations for accelerating the pace. This led to establishment of ICSSR in 1969 to promote, fund and provide direction to SSR and research institutes engaged in such research.

### What are the Council's current priorities?

The objectives of ICSSR include sponsoring of research programmes (of interdisciplinary nature) and research projects and other research and academic activities like conferences, seminars, discussions and workshops; capacity; capacity enhancement of researchers through research methodology and capacity building programmes; awarding various types of fellowships to different categories of scholars – national, senior, post-doctoral and doctoral; promotion of international collaborations with parallel research councils or agencies; and, finally, providing development and maintenance grant to research institutes in social sciences. ICSSR also undertakes research surveys, prepares major discipline (economics, sociology, political science, anthropology, psychology, etc.) related status reports, and maintains its own documentation and data resource centre, known as National Social Science Documentation Centre.

Our priorities include: original and innovative SSR topics; developing creative methodologies; increasing the capacity of potential researchers; encouraging SSR in unaddressed areas; supporting more international collaborations; greater amount of multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary researches; and emerging areas of policy attention at national and international levels.

### What are the current challenges facing social science research in India? How is ICSSR working to address these?

Nation-building and modernisation of society are ever continuing tasks and in this process the need is to ensure that these grow together. But history speaks differently about it as the process of nation building has been considered to be mainly an outcome of developments in science and technology and also capital formation. But in this process, the development of society in most of the countries has not been able to maintain pace with such developments in science and technology, and so a number of issues, such as well-being, poverty, malnutrition, exploitation of various types, inequality, tension, stress, violence, etc., have appeared. These issues often act as impediments to the very process of development. The disparity between the thrust on science and technology and social science has been felt by numerous commissions, committees and thinkers. This is why several committees have strongly recommended for encouraging and promoting SSR and its greater use in public policy.

Despite the realisation that SSR is very important within the spectrum of overall research, SSR did not get the required enhanced support and reinforcement in India for quite long. This resulted in a lack of research infrastructure and inadequacy of investment in it. Most of the ICSSR Review Committee reports have highlighted the marginalisation of SSR, particularly in comparison to science and technology research. The goal of the SSR in India remains to be better defined to have clear purpose and strategy. There is no doubt that SSR is extremely important for policy conception,

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implementation and final delivery as every policy ultimately has to be accepted by the society as it (the policy) attempts to serve them.

Presently, ICSSR with the sincere support of the government is making a serious effort to identify the existing research gaps, emerging social issues and studies in those issues by sincere scholars, as well as urging scholars to correlate SSR proposals and findings with the needs of the society and policy making. We are noticing that scenario is transforming swiftly and there is some rejuvenation among social scientists.

### How does ICSSR support the publication and sharing of high quality social science research in India? What are some of the hurdles to this being achieved?

Publications play a crucial role in the promotion of research activities through wide dissemination of quality research output. The ICSSR has already published a large number of books and monographs. ICSSR also undertakes a Survey of Social Science Research in different disciplines and identifies the spaces where research is lagging in those disciplines. These surveys have been received well and they constitute a major reference point in assessing the position of research in that discipline. This helps various government bodies as well in contemplating policy for researches.

ICSSR institutes have also been publishing reports on various aspects of the state such as industrial development, agriculture development, human development, infrastructure development, social welfare, etc. These reports are of immense value to the policy makers at the state level. Many research institutes have their own journals, and more than 60 to 70 journals of other social science research organisations are supported by ICSSR.

ICSSR has earlier published its own journal of social science and also that of abstracts. It is soon going to restart publication of these two very reputed journals. It is interesting to note that within the Scopus database of journals, social science departments and scholars from ICSSR research institutes, Indian Institutes of Technology, National Institutes of Technology, the Indian Institute of Science, and universities have somewhat lesser presence. Indian social science scholars have the required talent to make a better

contribution and this could be done through improved training, exposure and sensitisation about the needs of highly rated journals. International collaborations and joint researches would be of great help in this pursuit for dissemination at international level.

### From your perspective what are the priorities for social science research to focus upon in the coming five years?

The ICSSR through brain storming sessions keeps inviting suggestions from highly esteemed scholars regarding new SSR areas. It makes a mention about these priorities in its advertisement for research projects or programmes. Some sponsored research is undertaken essentially in policy priority area. We think that current focus areas or even those focus areas for the next five years may include issues like urbanisation, smart cities, migration, cultural and historical connectivity, well-being-health and education, comprehensive analysis of poverty and erstwhile measures, terrorism, the gap between science and technology and society, demography - its changing compositions and related aspirations, old age problems, gender empowerment, and so on. We are already taking up research in these areas at all levels – national, bilateral and multilateral where we advocate for such research to take place.

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