Coverage of Indian Leather Patents in Chemical Abstracts

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Patent information is increasingly becoming important in the current context of international trade and commerce. The printed version of Chemical Abstracts still continues to be used heavily, and it was evaluated as the source of information on Indian patents using leather patents as a case study. The results of the study are given.

Patents, as is well-known, are an important source of technical information. Their importance is being augmented by recent international developments in the context of the TRIPS (Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights) agreement. Therefore, in the present scenario, access to information about patent literature becomes all the more important. Leather is a valuable article of international commerce, and increasingly production of the finished materials is being shifted to the developing countries. Dictates of fashion and global environmental considerations influence the various activities and products connected with the processing of leather. Patents relating to the leather industry thus assume more importance.

Chemical Abstracts (CA) is one of the main sources of information for research workers in the field of leather science and technology (LST) mainly because of its worldwide coverage and coverage of nonbook materials such as patent specifications. The other two international sources of information are the abstracts sections of the *Journal of the American Leather Chemists Association* (JALCA) and *Journal of the Society of Leather Technologists and Chemists* (JSLTC). It was decided to evaluate the international information sources including CA as a source of information on Indian patent literature in the field of LST.

THE STUDY

Leather-related patents were identified from the INPAT database. The database is a machine-readable database of Indian patent specifications developed by the Council of Scientific Industrial Research. The database covers patents published in India during 1972−1997. The data contained in the database is taken from *Gazette of India*, Part III, Section 2, which is the official patent gazette. Both keyword searching as well as searching by the IPC code (C14 for leather) was carried out to retrieve the relevant items. The term "leather" in this study covers the following areas—processes of leather manufacture, the chemicals and auxiliaries used, and the utilization of industry byproducts including collagen. It also includes artificial leather made out of leather waste.

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Indian patents relating to leather processing for the years 1972−1994 were considered for study. The starting year for the INPAT database is 1972, which is the year the Indian Patent Act of 1970 was first enforced. It was seen that CA up to 1998 covered patents published up to 1994. Generally, it takes 3−4 years after a patent is filed for an Indian patent specification to be accepted and published in the Gazette. After acceptance, it takes another 18−24 months for the printed copy of the patent specification to be issued, i.e., for it to be made available as a printed document. This time frame might account for the fact that CA 1998 covers only up to the patents published in 1994. The study showed that the JALCA and the JSLTC do not cover Indian patents. This thus leaves CA as the only major source of information about Indian patent specifications. The subject areas mentioned in the above paragraph are those that fall within the purview of CA as has been evidenced by the abstracts published over the years. It must be emphasized that many of the libraries and research workers in India still rely very heavily on the printed version of CA. A perusal of the National Union Catalogue of Scientific Serials in India published by the Indian National Scientific Documentation Center shows that libraries still subscribe to the printed version. Electronic sources are still not an automatic option. Hence, this evaluation is restricted to the printed version of CA.

There are two ways of identifying coverage of patents. One is by going through the subject index and/or by perusing the relevant section in each issue (in this case, Section 45 as it deals with leather), and the other is by going through the Patent Index/Patent Concordance. Generally, research workers scan through the subject section to identify material of relevance.

FINDINGS

Of the 91 specifications identified as those likely to be covered in CA, it was found that 70 of them were "covered" in CA. ("Covered" in that they are mentioned in CA.) Though the proportion appears to be high (nearly 77%), identifying these is not an easy task. Only 28 of the 70 are abstracted and can be identified through the Subject Index or by browsing the relevant section. Most of the patents

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abstracted are by Indian nationals and do not have equivalent patents nor do they form part of a patent family. The rest (42 in number) can be identified as being covered only by going through the Patent Index/Patent Concordance, *that is, if and only if the patent number of the Indian Patent specification or if the patent number of an equivalent patent of another country is known.* The existence of such patents is known only indirectly. Details regarding the patents could thus be obtained easily for only 30% of the patents. Effective access through CA is restricted.

Hence, access to information about Indian patents in this field becomes limited. In the absence of a well-established information system for patents in this area of research, information access thus poses a problem.

The 21 patent specifications not covered in CA are mostly by Indians and do not have equivalent patents, and hence there is no other access point for them. These then will be missed by those who use CA as a source of information.

CONCLUSION

CA is, as mentioned above, one of the main sources of information for leather research. Further, the printed version of CA continues to be heavily used. However, as seen in the study, access to information on patents is restricted because of certain publishing policies of CA. This might decrease the usefulness of CA as a source of patent information especially to those who browse through the subject sections. In this context it would be helpful for identifying relevant patents if the printed CA were to at least indicate in the abstracts section itself the patent number and the title of those patent specifications that are listed as equivalents in the Patent Index.

It is also suggested that the coverage of Indian patents should be increased by CA so as to make CA truly worldwide.

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