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A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE ACADEMIC WORLD

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A Study on the Role of Libraries in the Academic World

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Abstract – The library plays an important role in the academic world by providing access to world class information resources and services, and stimulates academic research in the country. Access to information is not a new phenomenon but it exists through ages. Libraries being the centre for information storage and retrieval did exist from ancient times in one form or the other. The libraries have transformed from museums to digital libraries over the time due to intervention of various technologies. The invention of ink, paper, printing technology and information and information communication technologies (ICT) are the major technological milestones in the history of library transformation. The printing technology helped the mass production of books and other printed materials and brought them to the portal of library as primary storage media.

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INTRODUCTION

As science and technology advanced, the print media was augmented by non-print media such as microforms, audio-visual aids, magnetic tapes and CD-ROMs as the medium of information storage and retrieval. Since 1950s the developments in ICT induced traditional libraries to transform to digital libraries incorporating documents available in electronic formats. The library transformation can be represented as MUSEUMS: **Media**-Clay, Brick etc: **Access**-Physical visit; to TRADITIONAL LIBRARIES: **Media**- Print: **Access**-Physical visit; to DIGITAL LIBRARY: **Media**: Digital: **Access**-Online, Remote.

Traditionally, the library is a physical place where collection of information resources in various formats (books, journals, videos, CD-ROMs etc.) is organized in a specific manner to meet the needs of a specific user or group of users. It is a service organization with both tangible and intangible assets. The tangible assets constitute physical documents and the human resources. The intangible assets comprise the invaluable services rendered by the library staff.

From ancient times, library is the laboratory for testing or experimenting one or the other technology related to knowledge production, storage and processing. Invention of the computers is the greatest contribution to the libraries and its introduction was traced back in early 80s in the libraries. It has transformed almost every aspect of how the library provides its services and performs its work behind the scenes. This resulted in automation of library in-house operations, open public access catalogue (OPAC), remote access, digitization, and creation of digital libraries. The issues related to current technology discussed or addressed by the present day libraries are:

- Digitization of special collection, establishing institutional depositories, use of integrated library management software;
- Implementation of wireless and mobile technologies for all time remote/ campus access;
- Bar-coded library transactions;
- CD mirror servers and accessing CDs available on network;
- Application of RFID in libraries;
- Web-site development, web-programming and management of the same, integration of web-OPAC and integration of multi-language on single platform;
- Production and use of e-books and e-journals;
- Services for distance learning students, disabled/handicapped;
- Technology education, training and instructional/education technology to support teaching and learning; and
- Development of technology centers and promotion of information literacy.

Many factors are responsible for a change in the landscape of libraries. Libraries have changed from time to time and they have to change in the future too. Some of the important factors that helped the libraries to change are information explosion, growth

in publications, users' expectations, rising expenditure and shrinking resources, rise of competitors, information technologies and digital based resources.

In academic environment, library is a place of intellectual stimulation and knowledge centre. Until 1980s, the information seekers were greatly dependent on print resources and libraries were unique places for provision of such information. The past two decades have seen a great deal of change due to ICT resulting in a demand for new pattern of scholarly information. These technological advancements have made significant impact on the growth of knowledge and unlocking of human potential. In library environment, the impact is clearly visible on information PRODUCTS such as changing document collection, the storage media, and format; PROCESS/FUNCTIONS such as automation of library in-house operations, resource sharing, reprography, communication, internet technology, search engines and instant message, and quality of service; PEOPLE-USERS AND STAFF such as choice of sources, death of distance, diminishing time zone, remote access, basic skills, on-line search, and duties and responsibilities of the library professionals.

Quality is a critical factor for achieving success in any organization. The concept of quality is not a new phenomenon for library professionals as it is rooted in library principles and activities. Though explicitly not stated, Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science, particularly the fourth law (save the time of reader) implies the importance of quality in library services. The law emphasizes that library administration be simple and efficient to save time of user. Knowledgeable staff provides seamless access to information regardless of format, whether the user is in the library or at a remote location.

Historically, the quality of library has been measured in terms of size- its collection, budget and manpower. Many librarians believe that quality is directly related to the size of the budget. In recent past, this concept has been changed towards the nature of the service rendered by the libraries and not merely on the collection and size. However, in the present day context, listening to the voice of the user is very important and the reliance on the library from users' perspective.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Saurine (2000) points the new technologies and internets have challenged traditional library services and practices.

Orick (2000) reviews the changing role of librarians. The information revolution and availability of wide range of information on web have created new challenges to the traditional professional ethics of librarianship. The globalization of information means that access to information is not linked by what is available in the local collection. The librarian is no

longer the primary "gate keeper" or guide to library collecting and organizing both print and electronic resources. Ability to access full-text resources electronically from within the institution or from any PC provides the user with convenient and immediate access to information. The digital library requires the local collection, but also to acquire access to the vast amount of aggregated information housed on computers throughout the world and to guide users to this information. In the author's view, technology will continue to change, and libraries and librarians will use the changing technology to provide the best access and service to their patrons.

Sreenivasulu, V (2000) highlights the roles and functions of a Digital Librarian in information retrieval, content delivery, navigation and browsing. In his article, he stresses the need for professional education and training for digital librarians in the management of digital information systems. The author fully advocates and targets the task of creating a new job title – digital librarian – to take care of digital libraries and to manage the digital information system.

Amritpal Kaur (2000) discussed the services and tools to access the information on Internet and described the benefit that the library can derive from the various services and facilities available on Internet however found that only a few university and educational institutes and government S&T departments have their own website.

Amritpal Kaur and Nandan (2000) discussed the impact of new and emerging information technology on Bhai Gurdas Library, Guru Nanak Dev University and also provided the status of library activities and described the infrastructure available in BGL library; including hardware and software. They mentioned the library automation plans and suggested the steps needed to be taken for full exploitation of technological advances for better arrangement of information sources and fruitful delivery of information services.

Arora and Lekhi (2000) explained multimedia as convergence of computer and communication technology and also discussed the role by multimedia technology in modernizing library services. The authors highlighted the problems in applications and uses of multimedia would accept. They concluded that multimedia would occupy an important place in the information centers as a modern toll in future.

Askhita (2000) revealed that since 1998, Al-Assad National Library has allowed its visitors to use the Internet, and has published its online public access catalogue on an Internet-enabled server. He also advised that the Arab world should involve it in information production, and e-commerce, rather than consumers only.

Al-Zahrani (2000) revealed that out of 121 respondents 62 per cent use computers and 38 per cent use CD-ROM. Kuwait University library has

introduced CDROM and Internet facility in its libraries. Similarly, University of Bahrain libraries have implemented electronic check system, and are using CD-ROM databases.

Ondari-Okemwa (2000) reports a study undertaken to examine the specific training needs of practicing professional librarians in the Kenyan public university libraries.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The primary objective of the study is to understand the nature of Technology- supported resources, facilities and services provided in university libraries in Haryana and assess quality of those services as perceived by customers/ users. The specific objectives of the proposed study are:

- 1 To find out the status of information, information technology and physical infrastructure in university libraries in Haryana for meeting the ever growing demands of users;
2. To know the impact of Technology on library functions as perceived by library professionals and users;
3. To find out the status of computerization of university libraries;
4. To find out the participation and contribution of university libraries in various networks;
5. To assess customer expectations, perceptions of service quality and gaps in perceived service quality ;
6. To know the problems experienced by librarians during technology adoption and their future plans; and
7. To suggest ways and means for bridging the gap to improve the situation, if warranted.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Haryana has a network of educational institutions. While a primary school is available within radius of one kilometer, middle level education facilities are available within a radius of 1.87 kilometers and high schools are available within a radius of 2.1 kilometers. There were 11,013 Primary Schools, 1,918 Middle Schools, 3,023 High Schools and 1,301 Senior secondary schools functioning during 2001-2002 in the State. Presently, there are four Universities and 214 Colleges with 161 Colleges of general education and 53 institutions exclusively for women in the State.

The distribution of total enrolment in colleges category-wise was Arts and Science colleges 91.04 percent, Teacher Training colleges 1.11 percent, Medical Colleges 1.66 percent, Agriculture colleges 1.00 percent, Engineering Colleges 3.20 percent, Veterinary colleges 0.33 percent. Physical education Colleges 0.59 percent and Oriental College 1.47 percent during the year 1998. The 10+2 education system consists of two components i.e. vocational and general education. The vocational program was introduced in 1983-84 in 24 institutions. Their number rose to 118 with seating capacity of 15440 in 1998-99. The enrolment in these institutions was 16982 students in 1999-2000. In the year 2001-2002 Haryana's literacy rate stands at 68.59 % with males at 79.25 % and females at 56.31 %. Stress is being laid on the promotion of primary education so as to check the drop-out rate at lower level. A number of incentives are also given to the students to attract them to the educational institutes.

Haryana's main concern is to tackle the problem of illiteracy among its female population. The importance of education among girls and its overall impact on the welfare of children and community as a whole cannot be over ruled. Concessions and incentives for girls especially those belonging to backward/ EWS and scheduled castes have gone a long way in promoting female education. Scheduled Caste/ EWS girls in primary, middle and high classes are being provided with free uniforms. Scheduled Caste/EWS students are provided grants for books and stationery articles and are awarded scholarships and reimbursement of tuition fees. The Haryana Government is providing free education to the women up to graduation level and also in technical institutes.

In the year 2001-2002, Haryana had 30 Engineering Colleges, 29 Polytechnics, 12 MBA Colleges, 18 MCA Colleges, 3 B. Pharmacy Colleges, 76 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 116 Vocational educational institutes. Haryana also has three flying clubs, one each at Karnal, Hissar and Pinjore, where flying is taught, and from where private pilot license (PPL) can be obtained. Haryana has 622 AICTE-approved technical institutions other than Deemed Private Universities and Central Institutes.

IT AND INNOVATION IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Some of the areas of library and information services which can be effectively rendered with the help of IT are mentioned below:

Tailor Mad Services: Provision of uniform or common service to all is found unsuitable in libraries particularly special libraries. IT enables libraries to provide lot of need based tailor made services which

are expected to increase the effectiveness of services.

Intensified Current Awareness Services; provision of increased opportunity to browse latest literature in both core as well as related/peripheral areas and carrying current awareness services(tailored to the need) to the work spots and laboratories of otherwise busy users it has become simple and easy with IT.

Extensive provision for Browsing: Past research has repeatedly revealed that browsing is the most often used method to learn about new information. Libraries have to make extensive provision to enable their users to browse information sources which incidentally enable users to discover relevant information in an unplanned accidental way.

It is IT with remote browsing facilities and full text databases provided ample scope for browsing information by users.

Direct Mode of Service: It is high time that libraries evolve a more liberal policy of promoting the use of primary documents either in print or in electronic media without expecting users to visit library. It has many options in this regard.

Inducting Non-users to Libraries: Use of a library is by and large a minority affair. A small cross section of target user population normally use their 'primary' library. Libraries have not only to find ways and means of inducing and inducting the non-users but also make use of IT to take library to the users.

User Orientation : There is a greater need for exhaustive orientation programmes to users of libraries (especially to new entrants and less frequent users) in using libraries as well as new systems and services based on IT. We need few modules of user-orientation programmes locally developed and tested for the purpose.

Organization of Personal Information Systems : As a logical extension of user education, there is a need for imparting informal training to users of libraries in organizing personal information systems consisting of references, notes, abstracts and documents in various forms like registers, notebooks, files, loose sheets, cards and desk diaries, etc. Well organized personal information system facilitates and stimulates better and more intensive utilization of accumulated information that in turn stimulates creative thinking and that lead to improved style of intellectual work of user. In other words, Personal information system prevents information once gained from being lost, intensifies the use of available information resources, improves organization of knowledge, provides opportunity for creative use of information, allows for linking of facts and ideas and helps to discover hitherto unseen relations, associations and conclusions. Often, users consider personal collection/libraries more important than institutional libraries. For all the concern librarians have lavished over management and automation of

institutional collection and for all the expertise they have gained as a result, not much effort/interest is shown in personal information management (Dow, 1987, p30). Using the knowledge and experience of management of bibliographic environment, librarians can help their patrons in searching literature through online or CD-ROM databases and further processing of downloaded data through PC using several online utilities and off shelf software in addition to organizing traditional personal collection. Wherever possible the personal and departmental systems should be integrated with the organized formal information systems.

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