NEW DIMENSIONS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES : AN INTROSPECTION*

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Abstract: Explains the concept 'new dimensions' of library and information services, highlights the emphasis on service in special libraries, presents broad categories of services in special libraries, examines bibliographic, document delivery, information and instruction services to identify new dimensions, if any, in last two decades in the country, and reports only a marginal cosmetic new dimensions seen in these services, explores the reasons for lack of new and innovative services, presents different factors which might cause changes and innovation in library and information services, discusses some anticipated new services and lastly concludes by identifying no significant innovative change in library and information services or philosophy of services and no 'new dimension' worth the name during last two decades except the external winds of information technology which at some places helped achieving speed, efficiency and effectiveness in media and mode of library and information services.

1. Introduction

Libraries are service institutions. Any positive change in services to meet the objectives of libraries alone can be considered as indication of progress. Such change presupposes setting clear, unambiguous and measurable objectives and systematic and periodic evaluation of the services rendered on the basis of the objectives. When we think of new dimensions of library and information services, we are not much concerned with dramatic quantitative increase in services or introduction of substitute services due to extraneous changes. We are genuinely interested in seeing introduction of new services to meet requirements of users hitherto not met and qualitative and positive changes, if any, in the existing services.

This presentation is concerned with services of special libraries in our environment with the objective of seeing any noticeable new dimension in their services for last two decades or so (conveniently limited to the length of personal experience of the author). The presentation is more or less in the form of feelings and hunches based on personal experience and observations rather than systematic research. Unfortunately there are not many evaluation reports about services of Indian special libraries to carryout systematic study. There are differences among professionals about tangibility of assessing the services of libraries. Yet a number of quantitative assessments of libraries and their services are reported from developed countries. An attempt is also made here to see what are the factors behind changes and innovation in library and information services, if any and what new services and what changes in the existing services are expected/desired.

2. Special Library Services

Special libraries (or more pleasently for last two decades or so information centres) are suppose to emphasise service than custodianship of collection, try to provide a very specialised and personalised services (Waldron, 1971) and assume greater responsibility in the subject analysis of the collection. In other words there should be a greater degree of aggressive service and technological sophistication in special libraries. No two special libraries are identical in their collection, services and operations as much depends on the nature of the subjects covered, the needs of users and economic limitations. Further, no single service of a special library covers the entire interests of the organisation it serves. It is suppose to device and offer a variety of specialised and

personalised services with different intentions. The service which has limited access is expected to be timely, precise, comprehensive and continuous. What is to be served is suppose to be authentic and assessed information than passive documents. The purpose of the service is to enable users to solve complex problems rather than for general advancement of knowledge. Thus "the distinguishing characteristics of special librarianship is service. It is service which stops at nothing short of producing on request or without request information which is needed, at the time it is needed, and the form in which it is needed, and in a manner which inspires confidence and respect for the librarian on the part of the user" (Vormelker, 1952, p200).

Some of the common services offered by special libraries include abstracting, current awareness, SDI, state-of-the-art and trend reports, subject inquiries, comprehensive and current literature search, retrospective bibliographies, translation, reprographic and other services. Often special libraries prepare, edit and publish company brochures, bulletins and reports.

3. `New Dimensions' of Library and Information Services

Having seen briefly importance of services in special libraries and some common services of special libraries, let us examine few of them to see what positive and qualitative changes are noticeable in them during in last two decades. Before identifying some services for discussion, a look at the published annual reports of one or two prominent special libraries in the country (for the representative years 1969-70, 1979-80 and 1989-90) revealed that during 1969-70 libraries emphasised collection development and reprography, during 1979-80, use of computers and delegated online

search of databases and during 1989-90 it is direct online access of databases and search services on CD-ROM databases.

Library services are broadly grouped in the following six categories: (1) Document delivery services (2) Bibliographic (or citation) services (3) Information (or reference or answer) services (4) Instruction services (5) Facilities services and (6) Adjunct services (behind the screen-enabling activities like acquisition and technical services) (Orr, 1973 p321). Excluding the regular facilities and routine adjunct background services, we can examine the services of special libraries under the heads Bibliographic services, Document delivery services, Information services and Instruction services.

3.1 Bibliographic Services

3.1.1 Current Awareness Services

Firstly, many of us have a ritual of publishing (?) list of additions and other current awareness bulletins. A large majority of them do not attract the potential users and they are not much used by either users or nonusers of the respective libraries. The current awareness services are mundane, less attractive, bulky and often obsolete and only add to `information overload' of scientists and engineers. Tailoring them to smaller user groups, making them really `current', and creating a healthy competive spirit among users having similar interest through these current awareness services are necessary. One will be surprised to see many such lists carrying bibliographical details of six months to one year old acquisitions perhaps of two to three year old primary documents.

3.1.2 Abstracting and Indexing Services/ Journals

Secondary journals have been helping special libraries mainly incompilation of large and comprehensive bibliographies and at times in procurement of primary documents. Right now information technology offers some effective substitutes for these costly and bulky secondary journals. But no substantial change in services to ultimate users is felt except that the task of compilation of bibliographies has been made simple and easy but not necessarily cost efficient.

3.1.3 Library Card Catalogues

If only we attempt to see how our catalogues are used we would have discarded many parts of them like classified catalogue, author and title indexes to reports, etc.(Sridhar,1986) saving substantial time of professional manpower in preparing and filing these cards. But we have a great belief that all standard approaches will be used by users in accessing all types of documents. We will be surprised to know that in majority of the cases users prefer either to directly browse the shelves or to consult a professional colleague rather than using card catalogues and consulting library staff. Some body has even made fun of us by telling that cataloguing has become handicraft in this country (McCarthy, 1975; Jones,1984, p29). From this state of affair we are trying to move on to online Public Access Catalogue with the erroneus belief that change in medium will result in better use of the services hitherto underutilised.

On the other hand, users do get bibliographical references as well as actual information accidentally in an unplanned and unintentional browsing or skimming through reading

materials or while discussing something else with colleagues. These `lucky accidents' do bring useful information as much and as frequently as what a deliberate search in an organised information system brings and pose a challenge to formally organised information systems. Yet there are no attempts to facilitate and increase these most desired `lucky accidents' among users.

3.1.4 `Exhaustive' Services/ `Everything' on the Earth on a Given Topic

Disregarding the different purposes for which information is sought by users and assuming that only the `exhaustive approach' of academic and pure research nature is predominant, we believe and provide exhaustive bibliographies on a given topic even though users need and can afford only a short list of latest references. Prohibitive costs of online searches have accidentally (and partly) helped in curbing these trends. We wrongly believe that utility and professionality of a bibliography increases with its exhaustivity. Unfortunately this is one of the three criteria (the other two being pinpointedness and expeditiousness) to which we are wedded in our library schools. Most of the systems are designed based on `exhaustive approach' whereas users (particularly engineers) are more inclined to `everyday approach'.

3.1.5 `Surrogate' Mode of Service

We are fond of providing surrogate mode of service and traditionally reference mode and lending mode of service from libraries. We do not have any direct mode of service like that of circulating documents amongst potential users. Our authoritarian, custodian and audit-feared minds do not allow us to think of circulating journals, reports and other materials directly

to the users concerned. Indirectly we are glorifying to become store keepers than information providers. As such we carryout the ritual of stock verification with nightmares of loss and mutilation of documents.

3.2 Document Delivery Service

Having seen the trends in bibliographic services in special libraries, let us examine the crucial document delivery services. Capability indexes and satisfaction indexes of library effectiveness are some of the measures gaining increasing acceptance in evaluating a library. Document delivery services are concerned with the capability of a library to provide users with the items they need at the time they need. Capability measures both the service as well as the collection of a library. The satisfaction indexes tend to address delivery of services to fulfill the expressed demand. On the other hand, book availability factor is also concerned with the chances of an item owned by the library will be on the shelf when sought by the users. These capabilities of the library depend largely on facilities services, adjunct services and other background services as well as quality of manpower. As mentioned earlier we have had no indication whatsoever and even confidence to say that there is a positive change in the document delivery services including increase in satisfaction level of users or book availability factor.

3.3 Information Services

Professionally and academically we are also proud of talking more about information services than other 'basic' services like document delivery service or instruction services. Unfortunately, information services, particularly answer or reference services have not changed in their qualities in the last

two decades. The major factor behind such services is the quality of the manpower. As one cannot see any dramatic positive change in the skills, attitudes, knowledge and morale of library professionals to provide better information services, regrettably no new dimension in these services is visible.

3.4 Instruction Services

We are owefully inadequate and bad in providing systematic and regular user instruction services particularly user-induction, user-orientation and user-education. Even after decades of theoretical statements, we do not find even a single user-education module to proudly present it to an average user of a special library. Some have imported AV programmes and show it to their users. There is no local orientation to such programs.

Majority of special libraries do not have regular user-induction and orientation programmes except providing a copy of rules and regulations of the library. Hence it is quite undisputed that no worth the name 'new dimension' is added to the instruction service of special libraries in the last two decades.

4. Reasons for Lack of 'New and Innovative Services'

Having examined services of special libraries and found lack of innovative services, a dig at the reasons for such a lapse may be worth and interesting for an honest introspection. The reasons must be many. But three important reasons are discussed here.

4.1 Lack of Clear Objectives of Information Systems

Very rarely information systems in this country have clear, consistent and laid down scope and objectives. They have more of

hidden and derived objectives than laid down objectives. Some times it gives doubt that our libraries (and technical information centres) are kept as part of welfare activities or as a fringe benefit to employees or as a centralised way of providing xerox and printing services or to have centralised budgetory and expenditure control over reading materials. The cognizable roles the libraries/ information systems have to play in realising the objectives of the parent organisations and enhancing the work performance of their employees need to be spelled out before designing, organising and operating them. Today the objectives of most of our information systems are implied and assumed but not authoritatively defined and set. This flexibility allows stretching of idiosyncracies, whims and fancies and inducting conveniently called good and bad things to information systems. Unless and until the policies and objectives are stiffly defined, it may be difficult to steer an information system through cumulatively effective and efficient growth and performance in terms of its services.

4.2   Inadequate Understanding of Requirements of Users

Having no clear laid down objectives, it is not surprise that we do not have clear understanding of information requirements of our users and we have not had sound user-studies. Even though considerable research has been done in the area of user-studies in developed and information rich countries, especially U.S.A., Britain, Western and Eastern European countries, practically nothing substantial is done in less developed countries in general and India in particular. Not even a single major user-study in any of the areas of science and technology has been done in the country. Even the design and establishment of major national information systems were not preceded by systematic, reliable and comprehensive user-studies.

As such many present systems are surviving under `symmetry of ignorance'(Kunz et.al.,1977,p67-68), mathematical induction of convenient good or bad things, subjective considerations and idiosyncracies of people involved in planning information systems. Other systems are thriving under dubious reasons of avoiding the duplication of research and resultant economic benefit arising out of information systems but the hidden apparent reasons of an information system, could be treating information system as prestige centre or a form of fringe benefit to employees or a paid up insurance to serve an unanticipated need or to sublimate the feeling that one does not read or a centralised way of budgetary control over expenditure on documents (Myers, 1970, p26). There is a dire need for conducting scientifically based studies that will help define information-needs of given set of users (Saracevic, 1980, p226). Unfortunately user-studies are considered in this country as academic work of few librarians or that of teachers and students of library and information science and not as a process of designing and operating information systems. Some piecemeal studies done are also not carried out by persons `living with the tribe' but by teachers and students of library schools.

4.3 Lack of `Objective' Assessment of Information Systems, Services and Subsystems

Lastly, not only libraries and information centres have been designed without clear understanding of objectives and requirements of users, but also they are operated without systematic and objective evaluation. "Evaluation is as much a way of looking at things as a body of techniques and tools" (Cronin, 1982, p231). With the absence of proper feedback and evaluation anything can be said about any system or service. "The library is only as effective as the user is satisfied" (Katz,

1985, p378).   Without clear picture of increased user satisfaction, it is very difficult to say that the new or changed services of libraries are productive. Many services may appear successful.   But success and satisfaction are two different things.   We are forced to say that satisfaction is more important than success.   We have not made systematic input-output analysis as part of evaluation of library services to confidently say that there is increase in satisfaction level of users.

5. Factors Behind Changes & Innovation in Library & Information Services

Assuming that there are some marginal changes in the services of special libraries over last two decades, it is interesting to see what factors have caused these changes or if there are no changes what factors might cause changes and innovation in information services.

5.1 Information Technology

The largest single factor which has caused changes, if any, in the library and information services, is information technology including computer, telecommunication, storage and other related technologies.   IT has made it possible to introduce few new services, revolutionalise many existing services by providing new media, by increasing speed of processing and retrieval, by overcoming distance and communication barriers and so on.

Often, these changes and innovation in library and information services are more of cosmetic, psychological, publicity oriented and prestigious imitations rather than obsolete necessities. It is forgotten that these   changes in services by using IT does not assure better result if traditional   manual

ways of providing library services are themselves defective, irrelevant and unsatisfactory. New technology will supplement the old and not replace it mainly due to conservatism of users and value in the old methods. Secondly, new systems will succeed only if they provide something the user wants, and wants enough to pay for it like an improved service or a saving of resources. Clever technology alone is not enough (Simkins, 1983, p94).

Implementation of new services based on IT do not take place within reasonable time frame like conveyor belt system, lending system based on magnetic strips, burglar's alarm, bar code/wand reader based lending and stock verification, CCTV coverage for theft detection, press button systems, paper less society concept, etc., or face economic nonviability like costly dedicated online access experiments, integrated library and information retrieval packages, etc. for having ignored the proper evaluation of all alternatives as well as local constraints and conditions. There is a wide gap atleast in terms of time between academic or theoretical possibilities and fantasies and costly experience-gaining experiments on one hand and the practical implementation of them for reaching ultimate beneficiaries. In case of fast changing IT time gap ie., delay in implementation is more risky and costly than other shortfalls.

5.2 Changes in Objectives of Libraries and their Parent Organisations

Changes in the objectives of libraries and their parent organisations should cause changes and call for innovation in library and information services. But there appears to be no significant change in the objectives of the libraries irrespective of changes in the objectives of parent organisations.

Consequently the changes in the library and information services on this account are quite insignificant. On the other hand, lack of clear objectives of library and information systems discussed earlier continued even after decades of establishing the systems.

5.3 Changes in Requirements of Users

Substantial changes in requirements of users are by and large not taken   into account and hence any possible relation between changed requirements of   users causing changed services is ruled out. The basic understanding of   requirements of users is itself quite inadequate as described earlier and rarely enough attention is paid by libraries for changes in the requirements of users.

5.4 Professional Advancement

Development   of   techniques and tools within librarianship (ie., other   than   IT)   which   took away substantial research efforts during last two decades have also made no impact in changing library and information   services. As a matter of fact many theories and theoretical findings have   not even been implemented in different environments other than experimental models. "It is true that each year the relevant indexing services cite tens   of   thousands of contributions to the literature of library and   information   work, still it is equally true that there seems to be little advancement   of our   understanding   of the foundation concepts of the field" (Osborn,   1986,p119). Further, the ways and means of doing things have been given the greatest attention by the profession and methodology and means have become an end in themselves.   "How to do it has become more important than why it should be done, except that methodology almost seems to have become its own justification" (Osborn, 1986, p121).

5.5 Adoption of Allied Tool Subjects

The application of new management techniques, OR and Systems Analysis to librarianship has been talked about for last two decades. But no substantial impact of such applications of allied tool subjects on the library and information services can be seen.

5.6 Development of Professional Manpower and Competence

Another important factor (in addition to professional advancement) the profession should have been proud is development of appropriate manpower and professional compentence. Identification and nourishment of personality characteristics, skills and attitudes of information workers have not made any significant progress to cause qualitative changes in the library and information services.

From the foregoing discussion it is quite clear that the changes in library and information services are more or less driven only by technology and not by professional advancement or user requirement or desire of managements. Yet a mention of few specialities of special libraries at this juncture is necessary. Special libraries are known for their use of specialised and modern techniques and tools much in advance of any other type of libraries. Cataloging of non-book materials, use of analytical entries, depth classification, indepth indexing systems and a host of advanced information technologies are some of the common features in special libraries. It is special libraries which necessitated more private schemes of classification or standard schemes with many local variations and depth schedules. No special library confine itself to study of one subject but spreads across

boundaries of traditional disciplines which not only necessitates more relation in classification schemes but also requires versatile faceted and analytico synthetic schemes. In addition, the emphasis on subject areas keep on changing in the organisation resulting in re-classification and modification of classification and indexing systems. Special libraries are the first ones to adopt advances in micrographic, reprographic and information technologies. Due to their smallness, liberal budgets, closeness to users and easy access to several gadgets, they also pioneered in mechanisation and automation of library activities. Substantial part of computerisation and online access of databases is done by special libraries. Presently, they are planning for harnessing optical/compact disc technology, telecommunications, DTP etc. Most of special libraries are blessed with cream of professionals with better encouragement and rewards than other types of libraries. Despite such high inputs it is yet to be established that the outputs of special libraries are commensurating with inputs in quality and quantity.

6. Anticipated New Library and Information Services

Having examined reasons for lack of innovative library and information services and the possible factors which promote qualitative changes in services, few desirable new services are presented here.

6.1 Tailor Made Services

As mentioned earlier provision of uniform or common service to all is unsuitable in special libraries. Lot of need based tailor made services are expected to increase the effectiveness of services.

6.2 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 workspots and laboratories of otherwise busy users is necessary.

6.3 Extensive Provision for Browsing

Past research has repeatedly revealed that browsing is the most often used method to learn about printed information sources. Special libraries have to make extensive provision to enable their users to browse information sources. Such intensified current awareness services and provision for browsing may facilitate users to discover relevant information in an unplanned accidental way.

6.4 Direct Mode of Service

Special Libraries should evolve a more liberal policy of promoting the use of journals, reports, standards and trade catalogues among the users concerned without expecting them to visit the library to consult a document or to reserve a document or to borrow a document for a limited period and, at times, pay fine as penalty for having not returned in time. This may necessitate a need to be more flexible in the application of library rules and regulations.

6.5 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. Special libraries have to find the ways and means of inducing and inducting the nonusers.

6.6 User Orientation

There is a greater need for exhaustive orientation programmes to the users of special libraries (especially to new entrants and less frequent users) in the use of the library. We need few modules of user-orientation programs locally developed and tested for the purpose.

6.7 Organisation of Personal Information Systems

As a logical extension of user education, there is a need for imparting informal training to users of special libraries in organising personal information systems consisting of references, notes, abstracts and documents in various forms like registers, notebooks, files, loose sheets, cards and desk diaries, etc.

Users in special library environment consider personal 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 patterns in searching literature through online or CD-ROM databases and further processing of downloaded data through PC using several online utilities and off shelf softwares in addition to organising traditional personal collection. Wherever possible the personal and departmental systems should be integrated with the organised formal information systems.

7. Conclusion

There are no fundamental and philosophical changes in library services   during last two decades. The winds of information technology have been   blowing and making some changes in the existing services of   libraries   and   hence   any   change noticeable   is   strictly   extraneous   to   librarianship. Unfortunately, the lacunae or lack of any positive changes in the services   of special libraries go unnoticed due to extensive use of information   technologies by these libraries. The other type of libraries may not be   able to cover up the lacunae to the same extent as special libraries do.

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