Librarianship in Cyber Age

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OVERVIEW

The Society is heavily looking towards the library and information centers to cope up with the changed socio-economic environment making learning as a habit, so as to be acquainted with new knowledge. It is very much necessary to boost up the newly emerging ideas among the people keeping in mind the new requirements of the different sectors within the field of librarianship. Public Libraries will also have to cope with the initiatives developed in the society in the changed IT environment. Public Libraries can no longer afford to remain institutionalized passive spectators. All the activities will now have to be tailored to give long distance and often home delivered information. Public Libraries need to develop as a powerful platform for e-learning applications to raise the education standards in the society. The information age is here with many challenges and risks for the information generators and the information disseminators. The challenges before libraries and information centers are manifold. The main challenge will emerge from the expected change in the nature of future libraries and information centers. The libraries must change from collection oriented institutions to service oriented organizations and librarians have to change from custodians of books and documents to information managers and disseminators. In this changing scenario IT will play the most significant role.

Technology has pushed human society from pulp to web page, from manuscripts to e–books, from leather binding to digital archives, to specify from store house of information to Information centre, Knowledge house, digital library so on and so forth including virtual library i.e. A library without walls. This metamorphism that is quite visible in life flesh and blood in today's Library Information Centres (LIC's) is a result of unlimited and extensive use of Information and Communication technology in information acquisition, storage, organization and dissemination processes.

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WHAT TODAY A LIBRARY IS...

A library is an organization that serves the general public or special category of public in the community. It is described as an auxiliary education Institution as well as an integral part of the cultural life of man. In India, the tradition of learning had been commonplace since ancient times and the libraries functioned as an appendage to learning. It is a living force for education, culture and information, and an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spirituals welfare through the minds of men and women. It is a local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

Library is considered as a vital force for lifelong education yet its approach is informal. It doesn't dictate as what to red or not to read. It leaves the choice of reading to the individual. It conducts user surveys and studies to identify the user and their expressed need. These are kept constantly in mind while selecting the reading material, so that what is acquired is directly related to the actual needs of the user. The modern library has penetrated deep into the life of the community by turning itself into a cultural center by organizing activities such as lectures, book discussions, e-archives, e-discussion groups, online survey, monitoring centers and many more. Developments in the fields of electronics and tele-communication via satellites have revolutionized public library service. Libraries are hooked to databases, which has speeded up information transfer to users who want to have bibliographic, textual or statistical data instantly. Book selection, ordering, processing, circulation and recovery have also been automated.

EXISTING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The role of a library is, on one hand, to support the formal education particularly in schools and colleges by making provision for student's demands and keeping the library open during evening hours when schools and colleges close and thus providing scope for teachers' co-relating the class teaching to the recorded knowledge in the library; on the other, the existence of a comprehensive permanent infrastructure network of urban and rural multi-purpose free public library system interwoven into the very texture of the

social and cultural life of the people based on legal mandate under the umbrella of a state central library system is indispensable as a non-political, non-religious, cultural interwoven social institution in order to provide the appropriate permanent and follow-up activities of community need oriented and properly coordinated continuing non formal educational progranmmes, followed up seriously in a continuing processes; and to support the informal learning as well as of one and all and achieve universal mass literacy and continuing to updates of one's education freely. The informal learning of the individual based on environmental culture and family traditional skills requires be examining and mounding time to time in non-formal way in the light of new knowledge and changed environment and situation.

The bulk of the population is not information-dependent in day-to-day work and living. A large proportion of the population cannot consume information, especially if it is delivered in written form. The vast majority of the population does not have the means to access information. People in general are not accustomed to pay, cannot pay or are unwilling to pay for information. In fact, information does not even figure in their list of wants. The existing pattern of economic activities does not favour a growth in information consumption. The countries do not have sufficient capacity to invest in infrastructures development. Therefore, the future of Indian librarianship lies in descending from its ivory tower of catering to only a select few and the literate minority and to create a system that will penetrate into the actual information need of the majority of Indian people. So, there has to be a major paradigm shift to deal with the information needs of the vast majority of the population who at present do not have means to access information. Specially, the public library system in the country needs to be rejuvenated and re-modeled to cope with the present situation and the future trends.

LIBRARIES IN CYBER AGE

It is believed that where formal education ends, informal education begins and the lifelong learning process is continued with the support of free public library service. Education leads towards socio-economic changes, improvement in quality of life and human resource development. A library is considered an essential part of modern society and plays a very important

role in the society. It may serve as cultural center of the community, bringing together people having similar interests through different types of services. It can help in safeguarding democracy, creating political awakening, bringing social awareness and nurturing creative leisure activities. A library can play an important role in helping different sectors of the society. It may be helpful to improve production for farmers in villages. It may boost up a businessman to improve and expand business prospects. A library can create in children a love for reading, which can lead to formation of reading habits at an early age. It is helpful for students of all ages. It can provide job information, helping people looking for better prospects or those who are unemployed. In case a member of the society intends to pursue self-education, then library might be the only institution easily accessible to him. Now in these days Internet is the powerful media, which can sustain the interest of the viewer to a greater extent than books. The role of libraries can be explained on the basis of following broad services and functions:

- Promoting Lifelong Self Education- After finishing formal education at college/university level, people needs to update and enhance their learned knowledge and skills and no doubt, the library is the easiest medium to get it.

- Recreation- Books of fiction, magazines and newspaper etc. facilitates recreational reading. Audiovisual materials such as films, T.V., CDs, DVDs and the Internet may increase the utility of library. Utilization of Leisure Hours through the reading at libraries situated nearby their residence.

- Libraries acquire variety of current awareness reading materials like newspapers and magazines, which stimulates reading habits as they covers daily routine social, political and sports news. Libraries have Internet and other media resources and now the e-learning tools, along with the books and documents. These are very helpful in imparting literacy.

- Personality Development- In Libraries people of various communities uses the services and facilities together, thus they forms mutual cooperative social groups. The aim of democracy is to have literates,

learned and inspired citizens so the country may progress. This type of innovative training and guidance is provided by only public libraries.

- Employment and Information Bureau -Public libraries act as an employment and information bureau in rural and remote areas where such facilities are generally not available.

PARADIGM SHIFT IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Despite resource limitations, despite the heavy and complex demand for information and the traditional face of services, we must face up to the future and ensure that the unique skills of librarians to manage information and the unique value of the Library as a focus for community learning are shared with others. We can and should develop a vision, which encompasses and enriches the potential of the Internet.

The libraries have to face the biggest challenge yet. A challenge, which, if successful, could keep them at the very heart of community developments for many years to come, Information technology and networking now make it possible to manipulate and move information with ease; to package information in ways that can enthuse and enrich. We are already seeing the Internet being adopted by librarians as a resource alongside CD-Rom, the PC and the library management system. However, in considering the future we must not simply translate the paradigms of the past into 'machine-readable form'. While there are features of public libraries, which are to be cherished - the role as a community information bank and many more as discussed below:

PUBLIC INFORMATION BANK

Public libraries have for many years provided a focus for information about communities. Signposting information to other agencies has sat alongside files of information on the physical and intellectual resources that any community will have. With growing access to networks it is now possible to draw together all of the information resources more effectively.

The traditional task of directing people elsewhere for information could be replaced by direct access to another agency's data files - a World Wide Web connection perhaps. Such an arrangement would furthermore allow easy access to the information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year from any location with a PC and modem. It is already happening. The Freenets in the US and elsewhere, until now run by universities, provide a model which can be built on and public libraries in a number of countries are now beginning to explore this role as the community's information bank much more closely.

VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

There is a growing awareness that learning does not cease at the end of full-time education. People learn throughout their lives and the development of open learning centres in public libraries is now receiving government funding in the UK. In parallel with this trend, we find universities developing sophisticated network-based learning resources to support their courses. If they are networked, we should all be able to get to them. Rather than universities having rules to keep all but a few out, anyone and everyone could have access to these learning packages across the network.The public library, as the community information resource is set to become the virtual university. There are many people unable to follow course at a university who would be pleased to follow a high quality learning package designed for students, at the local library, or at home. IGNOU and SCDL has demonstrated that remote learning is acceptable to many. It does not seem to me unreasonable to assume that within perhaps

ten or twenty years the range of these resources will be such that we can replace traditional undergraduate learning with network-based resources available to all. The public library could be guide, resource centre and mediator. Meeting place, a place to borrow books, a safe haven - we must look for new opportunities.

A PLATFORM FOR E-GOVERNANCE

Public libraries may be utilized as an effective platform to e-government. In some states, "Most of our state government's operations occur online, as the population is widely dispersed and extremely rural. " In many libraries, the Internet "provides access to many governmental/legal forms that our patrons need." Government agencies may now refer their service recipients to public libraries as places in which to receive both access to online services and assistance. the initiatives have been taken at government level in India even state governments have also initiated their portals to in reach with the public every time without any complexity in communication process.

BRIDGE BETWEEN CITIZENS & GOVERNMENT IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

A public library serves as critical access points to government services during the emergency situation and natural disaster. The storms turned public libraries, and the vital public access computing and Internet access, they provide, into outlets for storm response and recovery in many locations. As community members sought assistance from a library and try to rebuild their lives in crisis and emergency situation. The following four major roles demonstrate the tremendous importance of public access computing and Internet access in public libraries in event of natural disaster or other type of crisis.

- Finding and communicating with family members and friends who had been displaced, evacuated to other cities, or were missing.

- Completing certain disaster relief formalities and insurance claims online.

- Searching for news about conditions in the area from which they had evacuated; and,

- Trying to find information about the condition of their homes or places of work, including checking news sites and satellite maps.

NEW MARKETS

With network access it will be possible to develop services, which are much more specifically targeted at groups within the community. While in the past many libraries have provided a wide range of business information. In future we will be able direct selected information to particular groups and offer value-added services, which will contribute to economic growth. In addition to packaging and delivering information it will be possible to open routes for those businesses to explore opportunities elsewhere, all from a locally managed service.

CONNECTIONS

Finally, we must remember that the Internet is not just an information resource; it is a world of people. Libraries could have a major role in the future in providing connections between people with similar interests. We try to meet the needs of many specialists; everyone has their own special interest and frequently traditional resources cannot match their demand for information. Mediating access to other experts and interest groups on the Internet would provide opportunities for information exchange, which certainly do not exist, for the majority of our users today.

CONCLUSION

Libraries are pioneer from ages in providing assistance to formal and informal education in India. But with the emergence of IT and Internet we need to change the functioning and approach of our libraries as the trend. In future many of above described activities will take place in the home, the school and the office rather than in libraries - it already happens. But it will be many years before such access routes become universal and even then the

public libraries will still be needed as the place where the co-ordination is done, and the place where people still go for group activities and for face-to-face guidance. We must take up the challenge now. If we do not promote the public library as a key player in the networked information game, others will take over and maximum community benefit may not be achieved. The technology exists to start these developments and by having a vision of possibilities, which looks ahead two decades rather than two weeks, we can succeed. People will help the libraries if they are to benefit from the wealth of information in Cyberspace; help to lead full lives and contribute to society with all the resources that could be available. With effective use of IT, public libraries could conquer the illiteracy and ignorance in the Indian society and very near to achieve the level of transparency and equality in society.

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