

Reiterating Professional Challenges

Some Observations

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Introduction

Library & Information Profession has been facing many challenges perhaps mainly due to increasing need for information. Both generating and meeting information need fall under the purview of professional responsibility. New information technology has given solutions for information organization and communication. But at the same time has given additional challenges such as controlling web world which is more or less a unclassified and uncatalogued world library¹. Searching Internet resources effectively is a complex problem, which only information professionals can realize. Searching on Internet is like search a needle in a haystack, more appropriately in cyber jungle. Due to these changes, there has been consequently a change in the role and functions of the librarian. However, majority of users feel that they are competent enough to search information on Internet. Above all, they are also heard claiming that there is hardly any need to visit libraries now since they can get every thing on net. How far, their such assumptions are affecting the profession can be well visualized. But caution is very much there. At one end there are such high claims by our users at the same time the other side gives dismal picture where our academic population needs well organized 'information literacy programme' to make them competent to search and use information which they need. Let us take up the most traditional tool of document retrieval – '*Library catalogue*'. What is the % of our users even in academic and research institutions who can use library catalogue effectively? Answer is with all of us who come in contact with users. Now most of the academic libraries have switched over to OPAC. It is only shifting from manual to automated environment but all the intricacies of searching catalogue and databases still continue with the users. There are many other such challenges, which need professional attention to seek timely solutions. Some of them are discussed below:

New Technology

Advent of new information technology (IT) has not only changed old library scenario but there has been transformation in many of its services. In fact, it is application of IT which has rescued the profession otherwise things would have gone beyond control. One of the challenges facing libraries is to adopt and implement every new technology applicable to information organization and retrieval and making every bit of information accessible and useable. Adoptions of new technology, innovations are not easy proposition. It requires new knowledge, qualifications, skill, competence, additional infrastructure etc. and attitude to accept change. Also institutional environment plays a significant role to bring changes in the existing systems. Quite a good number of libraries are still functioning in a bureaucratic

style where bringing any change in the system is full of bottlenecks and librarian has to undergo a lot of constraints to introduce new developments for achieving the goal. However, it is the leadership, which can find solutions to every such problems. Whatever, the circumstances and environments exist, timely adoption of new innovations and technology can not be delayed. It has also to be kept in mind that new technology has increased the expectation of our patron. We have to come to their expectation through improved information services.

Management of E-Resources

Digital divide has been continuing for quite some time now and is likely to continue. Some believe that with unlimited access to information via Internet, the need for and practical value of physical repository of printed material and other material are less compulsory². This statement may not be accepted by some of us. There can not be any other better media than print to preserve national culture and heritage. We shall have to preserve both. Therefore, Indian libraries in particular cannot afford to de-emphasize printed material. Their acquisition and preservation shall continue. Has publication of printed material declined as a consequence of electronic version of scholarly publications? Peter Ducker³ has rightly stated that online edition delivered over the Internet to be printed out by the subscriber. Instead IT replacing print, print is taking over electronic technology as distribution channel for printed material. It is a process of going from print version to digital and again coming back to print media. We prefer even to read our E- Mail in print version. How long are we able to read E-books? Digitization requires planning, creation and execution for which right decision is to be taken as to what resources need global access. We should not be over enthusiastic for digitization. However, only those documents should be selected for digitization which will have wider usability. Digitized version of journals has really proved boon, but libraries are still not able to make best use of this development. How many libraries have sufficient bandwidth to browse and download such E-resources. Time is not far off when broad bandwidth will not be a problem. However, many resources are being digitized which will have least utilities particularly in case of E-books. Whatever the preferences and priority are, the responsibilities and functions have multiplied where print as well as other media of information are to be well organized and managed which requires new professional competence and knowledge. We have to face print as well as virtual world equally. Hybrid libraries are like to continue and shall have more advantages over virtual libraries.

Information Literacy

Since last almost more than two decades, need for library user education was well realized in India and plenty of literature was generated. But the implementation of library education programme had been poor and ineffective. This is evident from that fact that our users are still not able to make maximum and effective use of resources. In recent times, computer literacy became essential. No one can afford to be computer illiterate in the present computer age. This literacy is also prerequisite for exploring and using computer-based information available in libraries. Some steps were taken by some libraries to educate their user in developing required skill and competence in searching their computer-based databases available in respective libraries. Unlimited access to unlimited E-Resources requires ability to find information which is needed at a given period of time in the most preferred format.

According to Association of College & Research Libraries⁴, user must develop ability to find, retrieve, analyse and use information. User should be most comfortable, confident and also independent in finding desired information which is not so at present. Are our user adequately information literate? If not, what initiatives are to be taken by the professionals and how? Even if such programmes are launched, users may not cooperate to participate. However, use of multimedia for the purpose may give better results. But certainly and surely, information literacy must be the priority so that intellectual resources are used to the maximum extent. It is also to be taken into account that 'Information Literacy' has been recognized as one of the essential code of professional ethics⁵ which must be give due importance.

Library & Information Science Education

Library and information science education in the country is also facing tremendous pressure of bringing continued warranted changes in the curriculum. UGC⁶ has also contributed by developing Model Curriculum to be adopted by all the departments of library & information Science. Significant change recommended in addition to the changes in course contents is to switch over to two years integrated course leading to Master of Library & Information Science.. There are no two opinions that new changes which are constantly coming up should immediately form the part of course contents of the curriculum so that suitable manpower is developed to face the present and future professional challenges. Some of the problems being faced by Library Schools are:

1. That revision of curriculum can not be introduced so frequently to keep pace with the changes and new developments which are taking place particularly in the field of IT.
2. Since traditional and modern librarianship are both continuing, so manpower being produced must fit in both the environments. To continue both the approaches, it is difficult to fix the boundaries as to what to be included and excluded from the present curriculum. Both sides shall have to be balanced according to the needs of today and tomorrow. As such the scope of course curriculum has significantly increased which is difficult to be covered in two years or in 4 semesters. Technology has given us application whereas traditional librarianship lays theoretical foundation. Both are to be taken together to produce right manpower.
3. Research output/findings are mostly not contributing in problem solving of libraries. The very objective of research is being defeated. Reasons need to be investigated.

Linda Jones Roccas⁷ has rightly concluded that Today's professionals must be able to wear that old hat as well as new hat, and it is today's library or Information Schools that must provide leadership. The information professionals of next century must provide traditional library in-person services and must now provide service to the wealth of Internet based information which is steadily increasing.

Information Services and Maintenance

It is common experience that unlimited resources are available to all in all locations. Availability of information is meaningless unless utilized when needed. Personalized help or becoming partner of user in information search which Dr Ranganathan also had emphasized is below the expectation of our patron. Professionals are more devoted to technical services

rather than user services. Many may disagree with my observation. Technological development has increased the role, where user needs assistance whether they express it or not. The first and the foremost professional ethics is to service the user. We shall have to identify some of the professional code of ethics, though many professional associations have already identified some values to be followed. This also needs to be introduced in the curriculum so that some values are instilled in future professionals. Koehler et al.⁸ while giving priority to user services concluded that without doubt and almost without exception librarians of all kinds in all positions, in all regions, and both genders identify service to the client/patron as most important of their value.

To provide good library services, the collection must be well organized and maintained. Computerised catalogue can not serve its purpose unless documents are in proper order. Therefore, most important for libraries is regular shelf reading and shelf rectification which are not getting due attention. There would be very few libraries which take care of correct location of material on the shelves. How much inconvenience is caused to the user if desired document is not found at its fixed location? Its realization is with those users who have to struggle hard to get their documents. Most of the time, they may leave disappointedly without getting the document which is available but not traceable. This situation is not only disappointing but frustrating to our esteemed patrons.

Database Creation

Almost every modern library in the country is engaged in development of in-house databases. Efforts are on to complete their OPAC. Most of the libraries with large collection are busy in retrospective conversion. Some of the libraries are getting it done giving contracts to outside agencies, where focus is on quantity and cost of input rather than quality of database. Accuracy in database entry and subject analysis are very crucial for effective retrieval which must be taken seriously. This target of data conversion is quite challenging which can not be successfully achieved without professional input. Whatever resources are in computerized format must be available on Internet as well as on Intranet. Most of the libraries are yet to upload their in-house database on net. This must be done on priority.

Sustaining Work Culture

Every organization over the time develops its own work culture which governs its day to day functioning. It is quite observable that employees give different output in different organizations. The pertinent question arises as to why employees with equal qualifications, competence give different level of performance. There is declining trend in work culture, values, positive attitudes etc. which affect the functioning of organization. The reasons for such marked difference in work culture needs to be looked into. Libraries also could not prove exception to this trend. It is admitted fact that success and failure of any organization mainly depends upon its human resource which has to be utilized to give maximum output. High academic standard of any organization is mainly due to its positive organizational climate. Organization needs to give favourable working environment to its employees. To cope up with all challenges, library staff must acquire new qualifications, competence and positive attitudes. Therefore, investment in imparting in-service training must be liberal which is lacking in most of the libraries mainly due to financial constraints. In no circumstances, negative and reluctant attitude should prevail. It is a challenge to the

leadership to motivate its staff to give its best and adapt all of them to changing conditions whenever required. A culture which promotes working environment and work ethics needs to be promoted for better performance.

Conclusion

Such challenges are many which are continuously coming our way. Without doubt, libraries are changing and these changes are escalating – librarians who recognize the shifting paradigm are in a position to actively reinvent the library and reform organization. New strategies must be developed if libraries are to be reformed to meet the challenges...⁹. Librarians must be able to balance their needs to support innovative and traditional services if they are to compete for resources within the institution¹⁰. We need experienced and knowledgeable professionals to handle traditional and digital collection. It is the top management, which can stand to such occasions and changing situations. Let us collectively think and find solutions.

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