

PERCEIVING THE CHANGING FEATURES OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

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1.0 Introduction

The concept of university libraries is changing. This is becoming a challenge from multiple perspectives. As a social institution, its value is highly rated in the society. Many slogans related to libraries epitomize their contribution to the humanity. Some of them are, 'library begets the social values', and 'library promotes the cultural harmony', 'reading empowers', so on and so forth. "The changing nature of library work is a subject of continuing interest to practitioners, educators, and researchers. Of growing importance is the particular question of how computer technology is changing jobs and being assimilated into all aspects of academic librarianship and how the new technologies may be influencing change, not only in library work, but also in the profession itself" (Lynch, Beverly P. & Smith, Kimberley Robles, 2001, 407). In Indian context, growth and the development of the libraries is interpreted as most influential and carry the iconic values in the society. People, society and the reading communities promote and desire the further establishments of libraries, so that the nation is improved. Academic libraries and its development in India are laudable. Academic libraries are created to support the academic values of the institutes with which it is associated. Though it is seen and observed that the vibrant pictures of college and university libraries are exploring at the same time, the scenario is pathetic in case of school and college libraries. In the present paper, the authors wish to focus on some of the observations related to the university libraries and its present context. Further the research paper proposed to reveal how different factors especially the information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the quickly emerging concept of digital library has changed or changing the shape of the academic libraries, university libraries in specific in India.

2.0 The Changing Concept

Academic libraries have a rich history and heritage and have always played an important role in academic research, teaching and scholarly communication (Fjällbrant, 1997).

University libraries refer to the libraries which support the university fraternity in a particular university system. The university libraries play key roles; inculcate further academic values in the university system. In modern days, as the policy allows, the university library exists along with the very inception of university itself. The story of its origin at the initial level is altogether different unlike its counterparts of established universities. The importance of university libraries is so much so that, often the universities are identified by its library services and activities. Sometimes the iconic building structure is so unique that the university authorities showcase the architecture in different platforms as its representation. Often it is named after some of the founding members of the university or big public figures in and among the region or the locality. While comparing the role of libraries, many agencies like the NAAC and NIRF, or government ranking authority put emphasis on the library and its services. This not only shows its importance but also how the academic community values the institution within the entire context of higher education. This activity of the agencies show how library services have meaning to the academic community and its sustenance implies the growth of the institute in terms of feeding the intellectual input to the academic community.

2.1 Changing Concept

The concept of academic library is changing. The statement is very alarming and it is a clarion call to uphold the values of university libraries. Traditionally speaking libraries are instituted in a huge building, is called 'library building'. The concept of library building is iconic and sometimes found with a unique architecture. The building is used as a highlighting factor, a representative marvel of a university and run in the front page of university website. Inside the library, the interior is designed for maximum use of the space. Different furniture of standard size and nature are accommodated so that people can use it properly and sit inside the library for longer time. This is also considered as one of the few symptoms of a university library system. Equally other aspects are also considered which costs to the library very dear in spreading the carpet, lighting facilities, and also to maintain a calm and

peaceful atmosphere. Considering another vital element of traditional university library are the study materials, largely books and journals. This is also an area in which large part of library budget is consumed. As the process is ongoing and meeting out this expenditure in regular business for a library is difficult. “We will look at libraries to most important resources, the things that they spend the most money on, material and people. The way money has run and is running through the scholarly communication system needs to be understood if we are going to shape how scholarly communication works in the future (Lewis, 2016, p. viii).” Lacking the procurement of these materials brings a bad name to the library and also hampers the study, teaching and research activities of the academic community. It has direct link with academic productivity and research output of a university. The universities do come under pressure to sustain with these value-added activities of the library. There has to be a library system which serves the university communities. This is the primary role of a university library.

The users are again important for which the university library stands for. The wide variant of users beginning with the bachelor and masters students, research students, faculties and other users as defined by the library. They are encouraged for the use of the available resources and at the same time expect their satisfactions from the library services. “Collections, whether physical or digital, are the cornerstones of academic library services. In a real sense, higher education is built on the knowledge of humankind contained in the collections. Almost all academics acknowledge the importance of the intellectual content of library collections, even those who believe in digital formats only (Alire & Evans, 2010, p.217).” To fulfill their demands, is a goal, full of challenges at the same time library aims to fulfill its own objectives in satisfying their demands. Gradually the quality and quantity of users are growing sometimes run into thousand in numbers.

The University library requires qualified and skilled staff for providing services. The nature of services have direct link with good, experienced and skilled library personnel. Some of them are considered as officers so as their salaries is at par with other teaching communities. This is another crucial aspect which the university and funding authority think again and again for the recruitment. The state, central government or any funding authority under which, it works, go for the recruitment of these staff as it has direct relationship with library services and promoting the scholarly information is needed by the university communities. The funding authorities often try to look for a slippery road intending the jobs to reduce with retaining the old values of library services. Altogether it is a heavy cost affair and equally cannot be avoided.

3.0 Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

The revolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has brought structural changes in library services. Professionally speaking it is a conglomerate of information technology, management science and communication methodology, has redefined the role and the services of university library. It has brought changes in the availability and access format of literature. The books are brought out in electronic format though additionally print format is supplemented in some cases. The e-formats only are encouraged at some places. With this, not only books and journals are easier in availability and much more comfortable than its traditional versions. Quick need of getting information is also possible with this format. No need to wait for months together for its arrival from the far distant places from its publications. “Within the context of these changes in HEIs, academic libraries are also exploring various avenues to deliver their services through mobile phones. Specifically, libraries are seeking ways to provide options to information sources and develop the needed skills to deliver enhanced user services. Libraries are harnessing the power of these technologies by incorporating them into library services such as information resources, orientation, circulation, reference services, user instruction and marketing” (Akpokodje & Lawal, 2015, p.11). At the same time as we have discussed above the cost factors have already been reduced. Sometimes one third or one fourth costs of the print versions which are available within a minute’s time to reach. At the end users, less space is consumed to store the collections.

3.1 Digital Library

The notion that technologies are as a force of “disruptive innovation” in the library sector has been discussed extensively in the academic literature and the wider press” (Tait, Martzoukou, and Reid 2016). Digital revolution is a buzz word in the society. Digital library is a new slogan. Its impact on the libraries is enormous and clearly visible. In digital library, all the collections or the major part of the collections are in digital or electronic mode. This helps the users to use or access with a machine or device at any point of time at any places requesting the book to be issued is much easier than its print versions. It saves the time, use-time is reduced and searching the collections is easier too. These preferences have affected the users to change their attitude and mindset in library use.

At the same time financial burdens are reduced to some extent, in purchasing those desired materials for the users. The resource crunch is no more a hindrance to the library authority. "Libraries must define their roles now, before the future overtakes them. What to do about technology? Should they be out in front of technology and change, should they hang back a bit, cautiously, and see where things are going before they plunge into the fray (Shuman, 1997, p. xxix)?"

4.0 Conclusion

The concept of new academic library has taken a new shape while retaining the value system of university library. The libraries coped with the hindrances faced by the library authorities. "Academic libraries experienced a period of rapid and profound change in the closing decades of the 20th century. Although information technology was the main driving force, other issues were highly significant, including the 'massification' of higher education and changes in society's attitudes to education (Brophy, 2000, p.189)." Moreover adopting the situations over passage of time are lessons for the university libraries. The technological revolutions made possible to some extent to increase the library collections despite the decreasing amount of the financial support. Though resistance often lodged in changing the features anyway including the physical atmosphere, the academic goes for its convenience. "Transforming an institution with long traditions is difficult. Many features of the academic library have tremendous power to resist change: acres of print collections; aging and inflexible buildings; state and private institutional governance structures that include outdated personnel and financial regulations; multiple conflicting customer profiles; and, not least, librarians' own perceptions and biases. (Michalak, 2012, p.112). The library communities are satisfied and also tuned with technological developments otherwise engaged with the research activities, laboratory and field work. The researchers suffered not having ample time to cope visiting the library physically, browsing the collections and picking up their desired materials. So far the physical presence of the users is concerned and their visit to the library is almost restricted to a sitting place. They are encouraged to read in and around with others inside the library implicate the demand to use the physical space. This has direct impact on the library authority, to extend the reading hall facilities. "These new policies and guidelines have had significant implications for research communication, publishers and academics and, of particular relevance for this paper, for libraries. Responsibility for the development and management of institutional repositories has largely been allocated to university libraries as an extension of their traditional function for the storage and dissemination of academic work (Swan, 2011). The use of physical space and making it available is not a difficult task for the library people. So it is imperative to concentrate on physical space rather than heavy expenditure on the library materials. Rather the electronic formats in terms of collections are promoted and the university library should concentrate on this aspect. So changing nature of university libraries is evolving and getting new shape. The process of change will go on and with passage of time the university libraries will exhibit the symptoms of further changes.

5.0 References

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