Libraries without Librarians

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In our country 12th August is celebrated as 'Librarians Day' in remembrance of father of library science, Dr. S.R. Ranganathan (1892-1972), who had spearheaded library movement in India. Due to his efforts, library community especially in educational institutions is enjoying academic status at par with teachers of school, college and university up to some extent. But now this community is shrinking day by day due to the rigid behaviour and attitude of senior authorities and policy makers of our education system which reflects in the degradation and deterioration of library services. If we see the past of library development, in every commission and committee report it is assumed that importance of libraries should not be underestimated in education system. If we need a quality library services, we have to appoint intelligent dedicated librarians in our education system.

Efforts for Development of Libraries

India has witnessed the library services from ancient time to modern age. Universities like Nalanda, Taxila, Vikramasila and Vallabhi are some of the examples of renowned learning centres of ancient time. Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekward had introduced free compulsory elementary education backed by libraries in 1883 in the district of Baroda and henceforth for the first time in India free public library services were introduced as a system in 1907 and extended to the entire state. McColvin Report of 1942 also recommended for the improvement of services of Academic Libraries.

Libraries in India made a tremendous growth after the independence of India in 1947. The actual process for the development of university libraries in India can be said with the appointment of the University Education Commission presided over by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1948-49). The Connemara Public Library in Madras became the State Central Library in 1950 under the provision of Madras Public Libraries Act 1948, and became one of the three depository libraries in 1955. Delhi Public Library was established in 1951 as the first UNESCO Public Library Pilot Project under the joint auspices of UNESCO and Government of India to adopt "Modern Techniques to Indian Conditions" and to serve as a model public library for Asia. In 1954, the 'Delivery of Book Act' was passed and obligated every publisher in India to deposit one copy each of its publications to the National Library in Kolkata, the Asiatic Society Library in Mumbai, Connemara Public Library in Chennai, and Delhi Public Library in New Delhi. Report of the UGC library committee of 1957, chaired by Dr. S.R. Ranganathan was published by the University Grants Commission in 1959 entitled 'University and College Libraries' was perhaps the first attempt to systematically survey the academic libraries on a national basis.

In 1957, the Government of India constituted the Advisory Committee for Libraries, with K P Sinha as the Chairman, which submitted its report in 1959 with a drafted Model Library Bill. The Planning Commission constituted a Working Group on Public Libraries in 1964 under the chairmanship of VKRV Rao and the Commission submitted its report in 1965 with a Model Public Libraries Act. The Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari (1964-66) marked another important stage in the history of university libraries in India. In 1972, the Government of India, Planning Commission constituted Working Group on Development of Public Libraries to make recommendations for library development. Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF), an autonomous body under the Department of Culture, Ministry of Education, was established in 1972. The Government of India, Department of Culture, appointed a Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System in 1985. The National Policy on Education, 1986 states that a nationwide movement for improvement of existing libraries and the establishment of new ones will be taken up, provision will be made in all educational institutions for library facilities, and the status of librarianship improved. National Literacy Mission was adopted in 1986, which emphasized education for women and also establishment of rural libraries. One of the most remarkable and identifiable development in the history of libraries was the foundation of the INFLIBNET in 1991 by UGC at Ahmedabad for giving training and consultancy in the field of library automation.

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National Knowledge Commission (NKC) was set up by the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh to prepare a blueprint to tap into the enormous reservoir of our knowledge base so that our people can confidently face challenges of the 21st Century. The Commission had a designated time frame of three years from 2nd October 2005 to 2nd. October 2008. The Working Group on Libraries under NKC (NKC-WGL) envisaged the future road map for the growth and development of academic libraries by imbibing core issues' such as, set up a national commission on libraries, prepare a national census of all libraries, revamp LIS education, training and research facilities, re-assess staffing of libraries, set up a central library fund, modernize library management, encourage greater community participation in library management, promote information communication technology applications in all libraries, facilitate donation and maintenance of private collections, and encourage public private partnerships in LIS development, etc.

One of the key recommendations of NKC- WGL was a national level census of libraries across India to assess the state of our library network and survey the reading habits of Indians to revive and strengthen the community library movement in India. On March 21, 2012 Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said that India will modernize and digitally link nearly 9,000 libraries across the country in a bid to provide readers access to books and information. The ambitious plan under the National Mission for Libraries (NML) aims to cover 9,000 libraries in cities, towns and villages of the country the next three years. He said the Mission will conduct a national census on libraries, work towards up-gradation of infrastructure of reading resources, and seek to modernize and promote the networking of libraries across the country. Fund of Rs 1,000 crore has been finalised for this mission, but it is a question on NML that, really will it change the scenario of the libraries in our country?

Shortage of Qualified Librarians

In spite of number of commission and committees we could not have achieved much progress in the area of library development in India in comparison to the libraries of western countries. In India, we are very much excellent in 'Planning', but when it comes to implementation, monitoring and evaluation, it is very weak. In every report, for the development of libraries, we suggest 'what to do', but the missing part is 'who will do' and 'how it will be done'. For implementing

and planning we need intelligent and dedicated human resource. But in recent years, we have been witnessing that there is a severe crunch of quality librarians which reflects in failure of various library developmental plans. Following are some of the reasons for the shortfall of qualified librarians.

Vacant Posts & Shortage of Staff: It has been seen that in most of the universities and institutions post of librarians and other staff are vacant. As we know, that librarianship is a service profession. We can't run the libraries without librarians. But in most of universities and institutions, Vice-Chancellor or Directors are not taking any interest in filling up of these vacant posts. If we take the example of prominent universities and institutions of Delhi alone, the situation is extremely pathetic. IIT Delhi has no regular librarian since September 2007, JNU had no librarian between January 2007 to October 2011, Delhi University has no regular librarian since January 2011. Here, the question is, that, if the heads of these institutions think that librarian is not essential for their institutions (which is Professor equivalent post), then they should abolish this post. During this period, most of these institutions have also advertised this post many times. In India, there is no agency to audit that how many times the institution has advertised the post, how much amount has been spent on these advertisements, whether the posts is filled up or not. In the name of autonomy, the heads of these institutions are wasting the valuable tax-payers money. In this profession, a new trend has also been started to appoint non-LIS person as in-charge of libraries, documentation centres and various library missions and projects. And it has been observed that generally non-LIS professionals never become the well-wishers of this profession.

Standard of LIS Schools: For preparing quality librarians, we need quality teachers. But the standard of library schools in India is too worst. There is no parity in the sanctioned post of faculty members in different universities. Many library science departments of central universities are running with single teachers or with ad-hoc teacher whereas some are having six to eight full time faculty members. The situations in Central universities which are converted from state universities are most pathetic. Some of universities have only single regular faculty in their departments whereas they have advertised the post of Professors and Assistant professors many times. There are many Central and State Universities which have started the course without appointing any regular faculty. If we

see the condition of state universities, many library science departments have appointed contractual faculty on per period basis. These faculties have been working for the last 10 to 15 years with the hope of regular appointment.

Manipulation in the Interview: One of important factors for not getting the qualified librarian is the manipulation in the interview. It has been seen that non-meritorious, mediocre and predetermined candidates are selected either on the basis of 'political consideration' or on the basis of 'monetary consideration'. In most of the cases, subject experts do not give their frank opinion on the performance and domain knowledge of the candidate. They merely attend the interview to fulfill the quorum. Chairperson dominates the whole interview board. Fresh appointments at several levels are not done on a transparent basis especially in autonomous bodies. Tailor made advertisements to suit an individual are notified. Due to lack of standard guidelines for screening, stronger candidates are screened out deliberately to make way for pre-determined candidates. For example, at the entry level of Group 'A' posts i.e., for Assistant Librarian or Assistant Professor (Library Science) the essential qualification is Post graduation and UGC-NET in Library Science. When number of candidates for the post is very large, screening is carried out keeping in mind to the qualification of favourite candidate. Recently, one of the Central University conducted interview for the post of Assistant Professor in Library Science. For one post of General category, they had invited 60 candidates for interview. This has happened due to lack of standard criteria fixed by the UGC regarding number of candidates to be called against one post. A new practice started in this profession is to declare the interview result as "NFS" which means "None Found Suitable". Such type of cases have been seen in many interviews where there is no favourable candidate of the Chairperson of the interview board. There are no defined criteria of suitability. It is just a matter of interpretation.

Contractual Appointment: Since last few years a trend has been started in this profession to appoint contractual staff, especially in newly established Central Universities and Institutions including IITs and IIMs. Appointment of contractual library staff is a new breed of corruption in this profession. The obvious motive is to unfairly place the contract appointees in an advantageous position for regular selections and it is obvious that vested interests are involved. One of the important aspects of 'contractual appointment' is

that, normally mediocre persons apply for such type of post. Once they get appointed in temporary capacity than after some time they claim there legitimate right for permanent status. This is a back door entry in this profession and is the easiest way to become a librarian in a reputed institution. In our country, many universities are struggling with such type of cases which are in the judiciary.

Anomalies in the Rules: Due to the attractive pay scales implemented after VI pay commission, a new trend has been started in this profession is entry from private sector to top posts in government setup. For example, to become an Assistant Librarian in government university which is a group 'A' post in the pay scale of PB3:15600-39100 + AGP 6000, the essential qualification as prescribed by UGC is Post-Graduation in Library Science (MLISc) + UGC-NET or PhD. And if you have 5 years of experience of Assistant Librarian, you are eligible for applying the post of Deputy Librarian in the pay scale of PB3:15600-39100 + AGP 8000. Now, it has been seen that most of the private institutions appoint Librarians and Assistant Librarians by ignoring the minimum qualification as prescribed by UGC/AICTE/NCTE. These institutions do not pay full salary to their employees, but give experience certificate mentioning full pay scales and salary of Assistant Librarian. Due to lack of prescribed qualification, these candidates never raised the voice and compromise with the management. On the basis of this experience certificate, these mediocre candidates join government institution through political or monetary consideration directly as Deputy Librarian (DL). After completing three years of service as DL, a person is entitled for next pay scale of PB4: 37400-67000 + AGP 9000 where total salary is approximately Rs.100,000 per month. Due to ridiculous qualification prescribed by UGC for Deputy Librarian that is MLISc and five years experience as Assistant Librarian, this practice is increasing day by day in our profession which is the most important reason for deterioration of libraries. In this way many mediocre candidates joined IITs, IIMs and Central Universities.

Time Consuming Recruitment Process: There should be a time bound recruitment process of three to six months for librarians and other staff in all the universities and institutions. It has been noted that if personal interests are involved than recruitment process completes within a month, otherwise, it takes a more than a year and some cases it has also been seen that institutions advertise the posts again and again till their

favourite person is selected. Delhi University, Punjab University, MD University, Kurukshetra University are some of the universities which have advertised various teaching and non-teaching posts several times. Combined Recruitment Test for librarians should be arranged and it is much better, if UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) can take the responsibility to appoint all librarians of group "A' and SSC (Staff Selection Commission) should appoint group 'B' and 'C' librarians for all Central Universities and Institutions to make transparency and time bound recruitment process. If there is an urgent need of the library staff for a short period than it should be appointed on deputation basis rather than contractual appointment.

Expectation from the Librarians

There is a common perception in our society that Librarians only procure the books and issue and return them and any information can be found on Internet. But nobody think that libraries can't run themselves. Whether it may be a scientific institution or academic institution, everybody is expecting services at par with the libraries of western countries. They never think that whether there is quality staff in their library or not, whether there is proper infrastructure exist or not. The founders of Google search engine 'Larry Page' and 'Sergey Brin' before inventing Google had a brief stint with the Stanford Integrated Digital Library Project. The traditional library classification system like faceted approach is now being implemented in organizing web contents. Librarians have become an integral part of institutions knowledge management team for facilitating reuse of information and for reducing the information overload. The 'librarians of the future' will act as information scientists, information managers, information analysts, search specialists and content managers. The information literacy training programme for students and research scholars will bring back the traditional role, which librarians play in understanding the requirements of the library users.

Acknowledging the Librarians

In recent years, there is a trend in the declining number of dedicated librarians. Indeed, in our academic institutions, the key role of committed librarians has rarely been acknowledged. There have been no attempts to define criteria to assess a librarian's effectiveness or rewarding them. Libraries are treated as a 'storehouse of information', with no emphasis on the 'delivery of information'. It has also been seen that there is no interaction between librarians, faculty, research scholars and users. The dedicated and scholarly librarian has become an endangered species. The academic and scientific community bears a major responsibility for this extinction. The importance of libraries and librarians in the institutional hierarchy has been downgraded by heads of the institutions.

Libraries can adapt to technological changes, but they can't be replaced. While libraries are distinct from the internet, librarians are the most suited professionals to guide scholars toward a better understanding of how to find useful information on the net. Instead of regarding libraries as obsolete, governments should increase funding for improved staffing and technology. Today, libraries and librarians are extremely important for the preservation of our culture.

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