COMPARATIVE OBSERVATIONS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ACTIVITIES IN INDIA AND UNITED KINGDOM

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Mr. R. M. Deshpande Assistant Librarian of Visvesvaraya Regional College of Engineering, Nagpur had the privilege to visit United Kingdom Libraries in June 1996. With his 16 years of professional experience and knack to judge and pickup newer services in Library and Information field, he observed them during his visit and identified the areas in which better library and information services that can be commenced in Indian libraries. He had also the privilege to visit Library Resources Exhibition at Birmingham on 6th June 1996. The physical facilities which were observed in the exhibition which can be added in Indian libraries have been suggested by him. The article will be useful in improving the library services in the Engineering Colleges & Polytechnics.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION :

The libraries in United Kingdom are not just a collection of books but they have more reading materials in new forms and formats i.e. audio tapes, videos, CDs and electronics databases. There is lot of difference between application levels of Information Technology in India and United Kingdom. The print on media, no doubt is most convenient and acceptable in UK and India but electronic media information fairly extensively used at levels in England than in India. The libraries in UK caters to various services as compared to the library services being offered in India. They are well ahead in STUDENTS INDUCTION PROGRAMMES, STAFF MOTIVATION, COPY SHOPS, DIGITAL NETWORKS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION THROUGH INFORMATION SUPER HIGHWAYS. They have well developed libraries may it be School, Public, Commercial or Academic whereas in India only Academic and Research libraries are reasonably developed in collection and services.

2.0 STUDENT INDUCTION PROGRAMMES :

Any student admitted to either polytechnic college or university, is first

being shown in group, the Video film of library which depicts, various sections, collection strength, staff famaliarisation, services, facilities and other usefulness of library for academic pursuits. A special class room teaching / learning is also undertaken to establish man to man contact between user and library staff. They spend considerable amount in bringing out various leaflets, pamphlets giving information about library and hand it over to every entrant. This enables the user to perform HOMEWORK when he visits the library next time. He is well aware of all the sections, services and facilities, areas of studies, etc. Thus he can optimumly utilise the library services provided by library. Of course, problem areas can easily be solved by personal interaction with concerned library staff. The small pamphlets give useful and recorded facts about library. Any user can explore the wealth of information / knowledge quite easily. The courteous behaviour of library staff makes user feel that he is more cared in library than anything. A due significance to his problems or needs is also accorded.

The above aspects of Students or member Induction in Indian library is very much lacking. There are some distorded forms of library education / induction. The library tries to orient the members orally which he is most likely to forget. If he is shown video cassette about library, specially prepared for this purpose, and given some handouts divulging information about library functioning, the usage of library is more assured. These programmes can be easily done in every library most economically. The librarian can formally conduct classroom teaching on how to use library for the benefit of new entrant. Once any member is habituated with use of library, his behaviour needs to be nourished in library till he remains to be a member of library. At no point of time, he should feel neglected in library. With the confidence that a person is cared in the temple of knowledge, his interest cannot be faded out and that is what is exactly done in UK and Not in India.

3.0 STAFF MOTIVATION :

It is always a difficult situation where the librarians have to work in India. Presuming, there are other compelling factors for teaching staff, not being a regular visitor to library, like urgent academic assignments, administrative work, evaluation, research work etc. but still, generally, the teaching fraternity in UK is a regular visitor to library. They also need motivation but in India the librarians have to attract them in order to spread correct message among the students fraternity. Once the students observe that their teachers are regularly visiting the library they will also carry compultion to be a regular user of the library. In order to improve the interaction between academic staff and library, we could try the following :

a) The librarian could be a part of the curriculum development committee and should be a party to all the changes taking place in this area.

b) The academic staff should be a party to major library management decisions.

c) The librarian could prepare reading list / bibliographies on the topics

being studied each term.

d) The librarian could circulate a list of current periodicals and have the academic staff indicate the periodicals for which they would like a content page service.

e) Encourage the academic staff to come to the library to look at a "New Book"or "Books on Approval".

f) Make the library a friendly welcoming place with a separate space for faculty in quiet areas.

4.0 COPY SHOP :

The concept of selling library services in addition to the regular once among users has been developed considerably in UK than in India. The copy shop or media centre, as they call it, has everything under one cover. Of course all the services are priced. Now a days nothing is available without paying anything. But in India, even if users are prepared to pay, the facilities are not available. In UK the services, like photocopying, lamination, Xeroxing, producing transparancies, binding, slides preparation etc. are the activities being developed to such an extent that nobody has to run from pillar to post for these facilities. Agreed, they may not be part of the library services but if extended to the members of Indian Libraries, they will carry correct massage among their friends and in turn library can be used more extensively.

In India, the library will have one or two photo copying machine out of them one or both may not be in working condition. This type of situation never occurs in UK. They have 20 photo copy-

ing machines, 5-6 D.T.P. systems, 2 Lamination machines, 4 Slide preparation machines, 1 or 2 colour Xerox and 5 Binding machines in any library. This will enable any researcher / Student to present his paper through these facilities at any conference or symposiums / Seminar. The time, physical and monetory efforts can be saved instantly by these services. No Indian Library would think to provide these facilities which are not categorised as library services. This is the area where an Indian library can make progress.

5.0 DIGITAL NETWORK :

In India, though we have so many networks like ERNET, HNFLIBNET, Metropolitan Networks like, DELNET, CALIBNET, but none of them is capable of downloading the text or graphics through digital communications. All networks which we have are either at infancy or can only be categoriesed as message handling networks and getting the primary sources through traditional postal or courier services. But in UK they have powerful digital network like JANET, BLCMC, Information Network, EURONET, etc.. Of course, they too have well developed connections for INTERNET and World Wide Web. The data can be downloaded from these networks irrespective of whether it is text, Photos, graphics, designs etc. The computer system at NEW CASTLE can download any digital file through JANET or BLCMP networks from LONDON or Ealing computer system. There is a free flow of information through data networks or ISDN. They also have transboarder information Super High-

ways for information transfer. The BLDSC operates on these lines and any request for information can reach to its desired destination within no time. In India, V-SAT Technology is offering this type of service but the library data either Full text or Bibliographical information have not been converted into electronics form. This impediment needs to be removed at earliest possible to enable atleast the transfer of Bibliographical information.

6.0 INFORMATION SUPER HIGHWAYS :

In India NICNET which has got 480 stations to handle Medical, Planning Commission Demographic and Supreme Court Cases Databases, are being used for planning or decision making but barring ERNET which is gasping for its survival, no net is capable of handling digital information. The V-SAT Network allows the information through Satellite Communication to have access to INETNET, GOPHER, WWW but these are very expensive. The common man can not afford to download any information through these Super Highways. The prices of these services will have to come down to have a wide user base. But most baffling phenomenon in India is, the more telephone or networks services are used, the more expensive it becomes where as in developed countries like UK, USA, France or Japan more they use telecommunication services for data handling the less they have to pay. In fact, the government should offer incentives for use of these digital networks in India so that in true sense, we would catch up to the above developed countries. The library may have Pentium, Apple Macintosh or any DOS PCs, it should able to log on to Information Super Highways at affordable costs. Then only, there will be a free flow of information in India.

7.0 LIBRARY RESOURCES EXHIBITION AT BIRMINGHAM :

The librarians of regional engineering colleges had also had the privilege to visit an exhibition of Library Resources at Birmingham on 6th June 1996. Most of the library furnishing, physical facilities, labels, compact shelving, Control panels to Xeroxing machine, stickers repairs technology including soiled documents, various library software, electronic databases, ON-LINE hosts, etc. were observed by us. A Few of them like compact shelving can be used for stacking unused documents in the library in India. Control Panels Cards operated attachments to xerox machines can be thought over in India. The ERL software produced by Silver Platter was on display. It uses client server technology for remotely placed databases thus ruling out the acquisition of that database by the library. It was most exciting experience to know the new products in information and Library Science Technology. Such exhibition can also be held periodically in India enabling the user to know the state of the market and the technology. These types of exhibition are only possible in Metros whereas small townships should also be reached by such useful exhibition.

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