

Towards Digitization of College Libraries in Meghalaya Problems and Prospects

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The digital libraries are the collections of information resources in digital content selected for use by the particular end-user community through electronic media. In this present era of information, computer facilities have become indispensable tools in library culture as they are effective and efficient in serving the library needs and demands. Though libraries worldwide are moving towards digitization, however from the Indian perspective, there is still a long way to go especially in the state of Meghalaya since many libraries in colleges do not even have computers. This paper explains the problems and prospects in digitizing college libraries in Meghalaya. As the world moves towards the paperless society, it is vital to emphasize on the improvement of higher education system with the provision of computer facilities for digitization of the college libraries to enhance the quality education in the state.

Keywords: Digital Library, Information Resources, College Library

1. Introduction

The recent trend in development of new technologies has enhanced innovation with a great impact on every facet of many disciplines. The domains of global knowledge and information have also changed shape accordingly, i.e. from the ideology of printed books to the web-based documents and from the conventional library to the digital library. The concept of digital library is to exploit the facilities of the collected information with a mission statement of sharing the available resources globally for providing easily accessible of the right information to the right community users at the right time. Information can be organized on computers and made available over a web network system containing diverse collections of such information for use by different types of end-users. Thus, in digital environment documents are available in an electronic form of media with the provision of accessibility to every piece of information in any format from any remote location. However, the digitization of library resources should be systematically organized and properly managed for easy access. The dominant aspect in the development of libraries is the ongoing move towards the digital distribution of information through the global network infrastructure (Mackenzie Owen, 1997). Now the trend in digital format is to store a large amount of information and this has brought new dimension to maintain the libraries as a living reality in the 21st century.

2. Definitions of Digital Library

Donald J. Waters - 1998

Digital Library Federation (DLF) defined digital libraries are organizations that provide the resources, including the specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities.

Stephen P. Harter - 1997

A digital library contains digital representations of the objects found in it - most understandings of digital library probably also assumes that it will be accessible via the internet, though not necessarily to everyone. But the idea of digitization is perhaps the only characteristic of a digital library on which there is universal agreement.

William Y. Arms - 2000

An informal definition of a digital library is a managed of collection information, with associated services, where the information is stored in digital formats and accessible over a network. A crucial part of this definition is that the information is managed. A stream of data sent to earth from a satellite is not library. The same data, when organized systematically, becomes a digital library collection.

Summarizing these definitions in a simple term, digital libraries are the collections of information resources recorded, stored and organized in an electronic format for easy access even by the remote users through computer networks, internet and Wi-Fi systems. Today, we are living in a competitive world, which is rapidly developing, where everyday life is needed and dependent on information and knowledge. With the ever-changing curriculum even in colleges, both the faculty and students acquire, disseminate, and use knowledge more effectively for their educational purposes. Hence, digital libraries are needed in the colleges to let libraries offer new changes and improve services, in order to raise the standards of college libraries in the state. It has now become one of the new emerging modes of information delivery to communicate knowledge on-campus and off-campus through online network system.

2.1 Value-added Digital Libraries

In this present era of information needs, the networked information infrastructure is a vast collection of available knowledge resources to which any community users can have immediate and complete access. What users actually need, however, is a mechanism which can relate their specific knowledge needs to distinct resources. This is precisely the area where the added value of libraries for the users can be found. Hence, selection, storage, service and support are basically the functions of the library to serve the end-users and will help to make the global network infrastructure an efficient and manageable knowledge environment. Libraries re-create the network into an effective source of knowledge tailored to the specific needs of users. Moreover, the other added value of the library is the provision of information chain

notably as a link between publishers and end-users through the resources based on license agreements (Mackenzie Owen, 1997).

3. Profiles of College Libraries

College library is the vital system of higher education for contributing of knowledge, skills and ideas to build up the future career of the end-users community. It is the life blood of knowledge and understanding, widening the mental ability and intellectual growth and development of the learners. Today, college libraries are regarded as a student-centred learning programme, where education could be imparted without the classroom lecture. The mission statement of college libraries is to provide the relevant sources of information to end-users relating to the instructional programmes to achieve its end results. It is only through libraries that the students can be properly prepared to face the challenges of present information age, in order to cope up with the present educational structure and pressure of competition. As such, it acts as a dynamic instrument of the teaching learning process of higher education. It really has a distinct contribution to make to the attainment of general education in order to assist the learners in the acquisition of attitudes, skills, paradigms and techniques that will be bestowed to the human betterment. Obviously, a knowledge-based library system is authenticated for the advancement of college education of today and tomorrow.

3.1 College Libraries in Meghalaya

An ideal college library which is well equipped with requisite reading and information material, providing effective and meaningful services, would become the backbone of any modern educational system. There are four types of college libraries in the state of Meghalaya viz. Government Colleges, Deficit Colleges, Ad Hoc Colleges, and Private Colleges, functioning under different administrative set up, that is, according to the nature governed by different administrative authorities. The total number of general colleges in the state is 55. Out of these 55 general colleges, there are only 2 Government Colleges, 14 Deficit Colleges, 10 Ad Hoc colleges, and 29 Private Colleges. Almost all these colleges are attached with library facilities, though there are variations in the building, infrastructural facilities, furniture and fittings, patterns of manpower, financial matters, and services rendered. However, some of them have well developed libraries with reasonably good collection of textbooks, reference books and journals, etc. based on the subjects being offered at the undergraduate level. When compared, amongst all these four types of colleges in the state, Deficit Colleges are very much advanced in terms of resources and facilities.

3.2 Automation of College Libraries in Meghalaya

The latest development in the field of information technology, such as, automation of college libraries in the state needs to be assessed for the effective functioning of the system. The process of automating the

library systems is by using the modern technology like the application of computers, library software, and storage media, etc. to help in information storage and retrieval activities. So far as automation scenario in the state is concerned, very few of these college libraries have computers facilities. The majority of them are still following the traditional/conventional method of serving their user community. However, some of them are having 'Internet' facilities for the use of students and teaching faculty. Besides, some of these college libraries have computerized their collections by using software, namely, 'Library Management Software', 'LIBSYS', 'SOUL College Version' (free software distributed by INFLIBNET) and 'E-Granthalaya' developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC), which was also distributed free of cost for both the Academic and Public Libraries in the state, where as in both the Government Colleges in the state, such computer facilities do not exist. When comparing all these four types of colleges, the majority of Deficit Colleges are having computer facilities in their libraries. Nevertheless, UGC has encouraged computerization and networking of the college libraries not only in India but also in the North Eastern States through INFLIBNET. This is good incentive towards automation of college libraries. Such efforts and initiatives are going to improve library and information services in the country particularly in the North-East including college libraries in the state.

3.3 Problems and Prospects in Digitizing College Libraries in Meghalaya

The phenomenal growth of information communication technology has revolutionized the magnitude of libraries and information centres globally. However, dreams of computer-based libraries in colleges of the state are still far away and impractical. Besides, many college libraries are finding it impossible to maintain their traditional collecting practices within the constraints of their institutional budgets. As a matter of fact, the future perspectives of college libraries in the state do not seem to be encouraging unless certain steps are taken to change the present scenario. There have been continuous efforts to improve the status of college libraries in the country at various levels but improvements have not been quite encouraging. The condition of college libraries in the state are not in satisfactory position.

Some of the problems in college libraries of Meghalaya are stated as under:

- Lack of library facilities in most college libraries of the state due to inadequacy of fund.
- Lack of financial resources allocated to the Government funded college libraries of the state. Unsustainable, inconsistent, unsuitable, and partial funding to the government colleges in the state.
- Lack of appropriate information communication technology infrastructure and internet connectivity.
- Lack of support and interest from the authorities concerned.
- Lack of encouragement from the state government towards the provision of computer facilities.
- Lack of manpower strength in all the college libraries of Meghalaya.

- Lack of infrastructure especially in the remote colleges such as, power supply, etc.
- Disparity of pay scales and status among the library professionals in college libraries of the state.

3.4 Some of the Expectations are Mentioned below

In modern education system, role of college libraries is becoming increasingly important to update with the provision of the computer facilities to support teaching and learning activities in order to cope up with the changing needs of time. The application of computers in all college libraries is a significant development, in which the learners can easily access the needed information. This approach will help the operation of works and can reshape the functioning of the library and its services. No college library can afford to be ignorant of the technology which is easily available to adopt. As stated earlier, the emergence of digital information enables the libraries to store more information and make it available through online access. Obviously, digital libraries offers immense opportunities to provide more information to more people, in more ways, in more places, and in more time zones, to keep abreast with the latest information available (Borgman, 2001).

- The standards of college libraries as per recommended by Dr. S. R. Ranganathan and UGC should be revised and updated to meet the changing needs and demands of time.
- It is mandatory to implement the college library standards to all the colleges in the country to raise the quality and standards of college education.
- The academic status of the college librarians should be treated at par with the teaching faculty, so that uniformity status and parity of pay scales can be achieved by all the library professionals in the state.
- Steps should be taken by the government to provide adequate resources and facilities with a well-equipped and well-maintained library to all colleges in the state as recommended by several committees and commissions.
- Provisions of computer facilities should be encouraged in all colleges in the state so that library resources could be automated for easy retrieval and use.
- The Government should act as a steward to steer up perpetually the digital libraries in colleges for the successful and potential quality education.
- The pivotal issue of flourishing digital libraries in the state is a great potential for the wide spread resource sharing and increasing information access and delivery mechanisms amongst all college libraries in the state.
- The state government should encourage all these colleges by distributing generous funds to all the funded institutions, so that the quality of library services can effectively and efficiently be improved for the cost-benefit of the end-users community.

- Information communication technology and power supply should be viewed as a core infrastructure in the state for the possibilities of using unlimited access to internet system.

4. Conclusion

Libraries, be they academic, special or public libraries, exist to meet the information needs and serve their end-users better, as members of the future generations, whether their needs are for physically based or digital information. As part of their mission, it is vital to adapt and integrate new technologies, resources, and information so that they will continue to be primary information resources to meet the users' need and expectation (Freedman, 2003). Today, digital revolution has offered tremendous potential to add value and reshape the system for acquiring knowledge and information delivery. Therefore, it is clearly seen that if college education has to be maintained and developed further, the Government will have to step up measures for encouraging computer facilities and digitization the college libraries which are the basic needs of academic community and must be met on priority.

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