

An Overview of Comparative Librarianship

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Abstract

Comparative librarianship is very hotly debated topic in recent years in the library world of western countries. This paper gives the brief description of comparative librarianship along with the challenges before present librarianship.

Keywords: Challenges, Comparative, Librarianship

INTRODUCTION

The occupational role of librarians in ancient and medieval times was mainly concerned with the collection of documents as cultural heritage. During most of its history, librarianship has lacked some of the major characteristics of a profession (Winger, 1964). The growth of modern librarianship in the Western countries can be traced from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The process of professionalization of librarianship started with the foundation of the American Library Association in the U.S.A. in 1876 and the Library Association in U.K. in 1877 (Shaffar, 1968). The first Library School was established in 1877 by Melvil Dewey at the Library of Columbia College in the U.S.A. In U.K., the first formal training for librarians was started by the Library Association. The Library Association also set up an official register of librarians in 1909 (Thompson, 1977). In 1933 Pierce Butler wrote *Introduction to Library Science*.

Thereafter many significant developments took place in the profession which established its claim for the profession. Today librarianship is characterized by systematic professional education; proliferation of professional literature; adoption and innovation of different tools and techniques for sophisticated handling of information needs of users and management of different types of libraries.

In India, the profession of librarianship began to emerge during past eighty years and needless to mention that India had a rich tradition of libraries in the past. References to libraries are very common in the ancient and medieval literature. Libraries attached to the ancient universities such as Takshsila, Nalanda, Vikramshila etc. were sources to classical education. During medieval period the Moghul emperors, nobles and countries had their personal libraries. With the rise of European settlements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, libraries became a part of social and educational institutions. By the end of nineteenth century, the three provincial capitals of India – Bombay, Calcutta and Madras – and many of the towns had their libraries.

COMPRATIVE LIBRARIANSHIP

It is a subject which deals with material on theory and practice found in different geographical and political areas, but it is a method of study as well as a subject. For many years, comparative studies have been conducted by scholars in disciplines and professions such as economics, law, education, linguistics, and literature. Not until after World War II, however, did interest in international librarianship and comparative library science studies take root in the United State. Since that time some insightful investigations of a comparative nature have been undertaken. These studies have encompassed comparisons of the practices and study of library science in nations and regions of the world; they have focused on such topics as education for librarianship, political control of libraries, library resources and services, publishing in relation to libraries, patterns of communication, cross-cultural influences in librarianship, and other related topics. Dorothy G. Collings has defined comparative librarianship as “the systematic analysis of library development, practices, or problems as they occur under different circumstances-considered in the context of the relevant historical, geographic, political, economic, social, cultural, and other determinant background factors found in the situations under study.

J. Periam Danton, a pioneer in the area of comparative librarianship describes as follows:

the analysis of libraries, library systems, some aspects of librarianship or library problems in two or more national, cultural, or societal environments, in terms of sociopolitical, economic, cultural, ideological, and historical contexts. This analysis is for the purpose of understanding similarities and difference, and for determining explanations of the differences, with the ultimate aim of trying to arrive at valid generalizations and principles.

According to Louis Shores, two research approaches can be taken in comparative librarianship-geographic comparisons and subject comparisons. Shores also

pointed out that, because quantitative comparisons are not likely to produce very reliable results. "the implication of this new research area.... is to investigate par scientifically", He also claimed that comparative librarianship can uncover "neglected approaches to important technical library problems" and furthermore, that it can "suggest a new critical role librarianship". Sources of information for comparative studies in library science include the following: direct observation, historical records, statistical compilations, government documents, library science professional publications, and a variety of other recorded information that can be used to make qualitative and quantitative comparisons. Douglas J. Fosket has written that "comparative librarianship has been noted for lack of a systematic approach than for its observance". Foremost, comparative librarianship is a descriptive research approach; thus several methods of investigation can be employed, including case studies, library surveys, survey research, and, in some instance historical studies of recent past development. In 1974, Danton indicated that relatively few studies of a truly comparative nature had been undertaken in the field. In characterizing a genuine comparative study Danton noted that it should be cross-societal, compare observed phenomena, explain differences, draw conclusions, and establish principles.

In the mid 1960s interest in international and comparative librarianship at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences led to the establishment of an International Library Information Center. The purpose of the center is to support the study of international and comparative librarianship through the provision of information training, and research opportunities. The International Library and Information Center also serves as a clearinghouse for data about libraries, documentation, and book production in the United States and in numerous foreign countries.

Among the most useful publications containing information and guidelines for the conduct of comparative studies in the field are: John F. Harvey's *Comparative and International Library Science*, J. Periam Danton's *Dimensions of Comparative Librarianship*; Simsova and Mackee's *A Handbook of Comparative Librarianship*; and articles written by John F. Harvey, Dorothy G. Collings, and Douglas J. Foskett. In addition, *Studies in Comparative Librarianship; Three Essays Presented for the Sevensma Prize, 1971*, a publication of the Library Association, might be of value to libraries that plan to carry out comparative studies.

CHALLENGES OF LIBRARIANSHIP IN PRESENT ERA

These may be as under:-

Users

Users use library materials both for collection of information for specific purpose and also to acquire knowledge that makes one wiser and widens the mental horizons. This process of development of knowledge is unending and which make the libraries indispensable for human civilization.

Now days whether due to information or some other reason the users visit libraries a very few times only for issue/return of the concerned subject documents. The reading habit is decreasing day by day. The reason may be that users are spending more time on audio-visuals. Non curricular reading is also essential in order to make each student a normal human being. In this case librarian in cooperation with teacher may make survey of college students to determine the respective interest group for recommendation of non-curricular readings. Some of them may be having different aptitude. This will help to make students to read extra-curricular literature and cultivate reading habits, which may be beneficial to them and of course to librarianship.

On the one hand; due to explosion of publication which make them confuse about what books to select for reading on the other hand develop a sort of intoxication for books may be broaden their mental horizon as well as save them from going astray, culturally and politically. Corruption drugs, immorality are gradually devouring the society and very bleak days of India are awaiting. At this juncture the challenges have come for the librarianship to try to save the society from degradation both intellectually and culturally. Librarian should be proactive rather than active.

Library Resources

There is a changing scenario of library resources. As all we know new form of information sources are not limited to printing form, there are audio-visual format such as film, video tapes, gramophone records and electronic media. A common characteristic of this alternate format is its reliance upon equipment for access. New formats are providing new feature for accessing information through information sources. They offer better way of organizing, storing, retrieving, accessing and updating information. They are evolving faster and new delivery methods and helping in producing new information products. This new technology is not only changing the scenario of information societies but of the society and its way of communicating and accessing information.

Librarians are to know how to acquire, to maintain and use of the equipment for access. New publishing techniques such as CD-ROM, multimedia, interactive computer works, machines-readable text file on the internet and collection of scanned materials stored in the image and character formats are increasingly becoming key parts to library resources.

Information Technology

We are moving from the industrial age where excellence in industrial process decided the winners to the information age where quality in information management calls the shots. However, librarians are finding a new competitor for their traditional expertise as information managers. These are the information technologists, the computer savvy, who have expert power when it comes to managing the technology of database, cataloguing and information retrieval. Information technology has a great effect on the working of libraries. We are facing challenges from the computer-based technology in which there is networking and Internet concept. One has to learn this new concept and should prove oneself skilled. He or she should be trained in the hardware as well as software. One must know how to automate one's library. Unless and until we will not skill in ourselves we cannot survive. We have to prove ourselves in the field of information technology so that information remains our domain.

If librarians and libraries want to survive as a profession and as an institution respectively, they will need to lead their institution in building improved information technology-oriented infrastructure. The numerous evolving problems to be overcome present, further opportunities to faster improvement in information delivery in a counting feedback processing. However, libraries are going to have developed ways to manage, access to material available in electronic format and to effectively share them much as they shared the print resources for over a century through inter-libraries lending.

SUMMING-UP

Libraries are concerned with the entire spectrum of knowledge: balanced instruction thus becomes of necessity an interdepartmental task. In this respect, educating librarians is something like educating writers. Each specialty, writing just as librarianship, presupposes a certain technical competence as well as a special language and some knowledge of a particular literature, all of which can be taught by a single department. But the great librarian, just as the great writer, needs the well-rounded intellectual development which normally is the contribution of several sister disciplines working together in unison.

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