Some Impressions of Libraries in Kuwait, USA and Canada

KRISHAN KUMAR*

Mentions the emergence of digital age and globalization, and its impact on libraries. Briefly, describes libraries in USA, Canada and Kuwait. Discusses innovations employed in teaching-learning process. Describes the role of friends of the library and volunteers. Mentions about resources of some of the leading libraries. Discusses digitation going on as a major activity. Describes free access to Internet and accessibility of resources. Discusses extension activities, special services, services to people with disabilities, user education, staffing, and security system. Describes issues concerning budget cuts, digital amnesia, censorship, dress code and filtering software. Raises the question 'do we need libraries'? Describes the efforts being made to improve the image. Concludes the libraries in Western Countries have a rich and long tradition of support from philanthropists and friends of the library.

0   INTRODUCTION

Since September 1999, I have spent most of my time abroad. During this period I visited libraries in Kuwait, Canada and USA. This has been a rich experience. I would like to share some of those experiences. The libraries I have described are modern libraries fully computerized and well managed. In recent years, there has been a resource crunch, as a consequence certain programmes have been cut down and services have suffered.

We are in the twenty-first century, which promises to be revolutionary one in terms of technology that effects our daily lives and our future. We are in the digital age now. It has already changed the way we live, work, learn and communicate. This is an age of innovations. This becomes clear from the description given in this paper.

We are witnessing globalizlation in different walks of life. Globalization has made its impact on libraries as well. Due to globalization, technology-based solutions adapted in Western countries are also relevant to us. In addition, many of the problems faced by them are also likely to be faced by us in the near future.

* Former Head and Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Delhi (Address for Correspondence: K-14, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi-110 027. E-mail: krishan14@hotmail.com)

Thus, description of library practices and services given here needs to be taken note of by Indian libraries.

1 LIBRARIES IN KUWAIT

I would briefly touch upon libraries in Kuwait. I visited Kuwait University Library, Kuwait National Library and a few special libraries. These are fully computerized libraries having latest equipment and large resources. Kuwait University Library was rebuilt after Kuwait-Iraq war. The building is very impressive. The courses and systems used are based on US model. The university has a library school, running master of library and information service. The school has a well-equipped computer lab. There are 20 PCs for 20 students. The students come from the whole of Arabic world. The University Library is fully equipped with latest information technology. Considering the large resources that are available, the number of users is far less.

2 INNOVATIONS IN TEACHING-LEARNING

A large amount of data and information is easily available on Internet and in print and non-print materials. This has led to copying of assignments by students. Plagiarism by students is a major problem in USA and Canada. www.turnitin.com a online programme has been developed by a California Company (USA) that compares electronic copies of student essays to a databank of existing papers and web pages. In case, it detects a match, then it spits out a red flag. This is a direction for the teacher concerned to investigate further to establish how much copying has been done. The company charges $500 per year and plus 25 cents per assignment scanned.

Teachers are encouraged to go for consultancy. For a university, it is considered a matter of prestige. It counts for the purpose of assessing a teacher and also for ranking a school. At the University of Maryland (USA), teachers are allowed to take one day off every week for doing consultancy work, which may require visit to the institution being given consultancy or for field work. The same conditions are applicable to faculty of library schools.

In many universities in the beginning of a term/semester, each teacher is required to compile a volume containing articles, reports, case studies etc. on the course to be taught by him. Multiple copies are photocopied and made available for the purchase to students in the form of a bound volume from the university press or book shop. Each student taking a particular course is required to purchase it. Libraries provide full support to faculty for access to material required for this purpose.

Each teacher in the university is allotted a website by the university. The students submit their assignments in electronic form at the same site. In case a student has a doubt or wants to convey his opinion or wants to seek information,

then he can send his query to the concerned teacher. Before the examination such a site is used heavily by the students to seek answers to their doubts. A teacher is expected to respond in reasonable time. It has been noticed that those students who are shy to ask questions in the class room environment, prefer this mode of communication.

I was visiting the library of the Library School at University of Maryland and found students filling up a form and returning the same at the counter. On enquiry, I was told that each student is required to fill up a questionnaire for each course giving assessment of the teacher and the course, along with opinions and suggestions as a feedback. The student fills up the form without giving his name. The feedback is used at the time of the assessment of the teacher as well in the revision of the course. The teacher can improve his teaching using this information. This is a normal practice in USA and Canada.

3   FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

A public library both in USA and Canada serves as a community centre. The public regards their public library as an essential part of their community. They support it in a big way through cash or kind. Public library movement in USA and Canada owes its present position to private beneficiaries of libraries like Andrew Carnegie, Bill Gates etc. The year 2003 marks 100th anniversary of Andrew Carnegie's grant of $ 350,000 to Toronto Public Library. In 1903, he funded Toronto's Central Library and three other library branches. Today, this figure would be with about $7.3 million. In 1915, Toronto Public Library received Carnegie grant worth $50,000 to build three libraries. In all $2.5 million were received for 125 library buildings in Canada.[1] This is just an example of financial support to the public library.

Toronto Public Library Foundation has been created for supporting library initiative through fund raising. The friends of the library are honoured and appreciated. The list of donors for a particular year is very long. They are given a designation depending upon the amount of contribution shown in brackets, such as benefactors ($10,000+), leaders ($5000-$9,999), partners ($1000-$4,000), friends ($250-$999), gift-in-kind ($250+).[2] Benefactors are normally organizations or foundations who contribute in a big way.

To support Fairfax County Public Library (Northern Virginia, USA) Fairfax County Public Library Foundation was created in 1994. It is a tax-exempt, private nonprofit corporation, meant to enhance library services for the community. It is normal for a public library to set up a foundation to get supplementary support.

Due to the efforts of Laura Bush (wife of the US President) in the White House, $10 million were allocated in the Federal Funds to recruit the new generation of librarians. Laura Bush is a Former librarian. She has been a source of strength for the library profession in USA. In recent years, the foundation created by Bill Gates

and his wife has given large financial support and equipment to school and public libraries.

There are innumerable examples of librarians and other individuals giving a special gift to libraries. Miguelita Costes, a children librarian at Toronto Public Library in 2001 made a leadership gift to the library to support children's services.[3] This is just one example.

4   CONTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERS

In western countries like USA and Canada, the concept of voluntary service is highly regarded in all walks of life. At the time of admission to a course or during recruitment for a job, voluntary service carries a high weightage. The same is true for the field of library and information science. Fairfax County Public Library (USA) has more than 3,000 volunteers to support it, ranging from teens to retirees to corporate employees. Parents of children often serve as volunteers in school libraries. Retired library professionals, house wives and senior citizens often work as volunteers in public libraries. Volunteers are used to help persons with disabilities at libraries or at their homes. They also organize many of the extension activities. Once I met a senior Indian library professional who had retired from Indian army working in Fairfax County Public Library (USA) as a volunteer for 10 hours per week. Sometimes, courts punish a culprit to provide voluntary service in a community centre or even in libraries. There is a "volunteer hours" requirement to be fulfilled. I wish in India, the public especially retired people should come forward to serve the society in voluntary positions.

5   RESOURCES

Public, national and university libraries are rich in library resources. Toronto Public Library system has 7.5 million books and another 3.5 million items including magazines, CDs and videos. It spends 13 million annually on books to add 400,000 books in 40 languages ($22.75 per book). 30 million items were borrowed last year by 1.3 million library card holders. It is the second most used public library system after Hong Kong, based on number of items borrowed.

University of Toronto Library is the third largest research library in North America. It has 14 million volumes, adds 2 lakh volumes per year. It subscribes to 26,000 e-titles (15,000 e-journals, 200 online newspapers) and subscribes to 40,000 serials including 450 indexes and abstracts.[4] It has set up counselling and learning skills resource library consisting of documents on (*a*) time management, (*b*) reading and note taking, (*c*) memory and concentration, (*d*) examination and essay preparation, (*e*) thesis preparation, and (*f*) stress management.

Library of Congress at Washington, DC, serves as the National Library of the United States of America. In terms of collection, it is the largest library in the world and also considered as great library from the point of view of collection and

services. It has 27 million (catalogued books, maps, photographs, films, audio-visual recordings, prints and drawings, musical series, digital materials and other non-book collections) with 500 miles of shelves. 10,000 items are added per working day. Under National Digital Library Programme, it has digitized its unique American historical collections. Records of the library are available on internet including card catalogue, online resources of information about Congress, major exhibitions with texts and images, information from US Copyright Office and millions of images, films and sound recording from library collection. From a researcher's point view, its resources are of a great value.

6   DIGITIZATION

University of Maryland Library has a strong digital library programme. This library coordinates the digitization programme in the State of Maryland. Various university libraries in USA and Canada have embarked upon digitization of items of significance for cultural heritage in a big way.

Library of Congress has a programme called National Digital Library Programme. It is a programme for making available digitized versions of its unique American historical collections. These consist of million of images, motion films, sound recordings, maps, documents, prints and photographs. These are freely accessible on internet.

University of Toronto Library has a big digital library programme. It has digitized special collections, too fragile to be handled. Lot of archival material and documents of cultural significance have been digitized. In addition, library's indexes and catalogues have been put online.

7   ACCESS TO INTERNET

University and public libraries provide free access to Internet. Premiums web sites and databases are accessible to members. Toronto Public Library System has provided 1300 computers to public for access to Internet. Softwares are used to block pornographic sites. In case, one has a computer at home; then one can search library catalogue and databases from home. Those members of the public, who do not have a computer at home, use Internet available at the public libraries. This has brought back public to libraries.

8   ACCESSIBILITY

Access to documents (irrespective of format) is a major concern today. Toronto Public Library provides free access to information through traditional and technologically assisted services. The library subscribes to premium websites and databases, making them accessible to the members, which they cannot afford on their own.

At York University Library (Toronto), a student or faculty member has free

access to the library catalogue, premium databases, websites, e-resources including journals, from the library as well as at home (using his personal computer). There is one center in the university, from where a member can download and print out any item from e-resources free of cost.

At the University of Toronto Library, more than 25 per cent of the access to the library holdings is disseminated by electronic means. The percentages of access are increasing year by year. The faculty and graduate students are allowed access at Ontario and Quebec academic libraries. They may also register to borrow from COPPUL libraries in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Similar arrangements exist in other university libraries in Canada and USA.

Library of Congress, DC, is a great library for researchers. Before September 11, 2001, readers were allowed to enter through a backdoor near the loading dock. However, now due to strict checking, it takes long time to enter the Main Reading Room. Previously, it used to take about 30 minutes, now it takes almost 90 minutes to get the book-request fulfilled. Sometimes, the answer may be that the item requested is not on the shelf. The reason being that for a long time, no stock taking has taken place. The item could get misplaced on the shelf or be missing from the library. A researcher would consult the *Digitized Catalogue* on the website of the Library Congress, which would indicate that the item is available in the Library. One would then travel all the way to Washington, DC, to look for the document, discovering that it is not on the shelf.[5] Thus, the *Digitized Catalogue* can be misleading.

91 EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Toronto Public Library System consists of Toronto Reference Library, Central Library, Urban Affairs, 12 district libraries and 83 branch libraries. Toronto Reference Library has in its calendar for 2003 the following programmes[6]:

Meet the authors

Seminars on (*i*) informed investing, (*ii*) choosing your financial advisors, (*iii*) websites, web tools, web tips - the best sites for investors etc. Research workshops on (*iv*) general research skills; and (*v*) genealogy on the web, etc.

Internet training workshops

Seminars on you and your health.

Toronto Public Library System has 83 branch libraries. Each branch library has programmes for adults, older adults, teens and children.

Albion branch has training sessions on instruction in mouse skills; basic keyboard and demonstration of WWW; Web basics; e-mail made easy.

For children, it has programmes such as Baby time; Preschool story time; Eggs-travaganza; Mother's day fun; superkids; Library concentration games;

Animal wilderness bingo; School can be fun; Summer stories; Summer leading to reading.

Each library in the system has variety of programmes to serve different age groups going on throughout the year. The above are mere examples. Most of the programmes are free and for others, there is small registration fee. For a programme entitled Calling all inventors: Patents, is concerned with how to get your invention patented. Registration fee is $10 per person. The list of programmes being conducted is very impressive. Such programmes are a normal feature of public libraries in both USA and Canada.

Last year in 2002, there were 13,000 programmes for children within the system, having a participation of 230,000 children.

92 SPECIAL SERVICES

In Toronto Public Library System, a member can borrow from any branch and return items at any other branch. Even if the, library is close, you can drop the item into drop in box. The same is true in many other public library systems in USA and Canada.

Renewal and reservation of an item can be done through email or telephone or personally. In case the reserved item becomes available for borrowing, then the member is informed immediately on telephone.

93 SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Fairfax County Public Library (USA) has set up one branch, Access Services Branch,[7] that serves people with disabilities. It provides and delivers special cassette players and recorded books (talking books) to qualified individuals. Meeting rooms of several branches are equipped with built-in listening systems, and many branches have personal listening systems that one can borrow to use during library events or for personal use at home. Each branch has an adapted workstation equipped with a 21-inch screen and zoom text software that can magnify text, 16 times. Branches also have closed-circuit television magnifying systems for persons with low vision to read newspapers or other items. Under homebound programmes, books are mailed or delivered to the members. Access Services Branch also maintains collections at senior residences, nursing homes, adult day care centers, etc, keeping books in both large and regular-size print for those who cannot come to the branch. The library provides volunteers to assist people with disabilities in the library and also at home.

Similar services are provided by public libraries elsewhere. For instance, Toronto Public Library provides large-print editions of popular works. In addition, it offers home library service (door to door delivery service) for talking books, CDs and videos for persons with disabilities.

Montgomery County Public Library (Maryland, USA) provides audio books

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at meeting rooms, homebound services, newsline for the blind, nursing home deposit collections and telecommunication devices for the deaf. In addition, it makes available sign language, cued speech and oral interpreters for library-sponsored programmes.

It is a normal practice to have library accessible to handicapped members using wheel chair.

94 USER EDUCATION

At University of Toronto Library, orientation for faculty and students to library services, collections and online databases is provided through general information workshops and focused curriculum-based orientation. Each term, the library offers a databases instruction programme on a wide range of electronic resources and other topics. On request, instruction customized for a course or curriculum or department can be arranged.

At York University Library focused curriculum-based orientation is provided. For example the students in environmental studies are given orientation and also a booklet about how to navigate the "York University Library" Website for Resources in Environmental Studies" is handed over to them. This booklet gives step by step searching of resources and also contains a list of electronic journals and printed journals relating to environmental studies.

University of Maryland has a very strong user education programme. User education programmes are provided at different levels for various subjects and different technologies. A separate room with 50 computers has been set apart for this purpose, with a group of experienced library professional appointed for giving instruction.

At Toronto Reference Library, general orientation tours are organized. It also offers workshops and training courses on variety of topics such as searching of health information, business information etc; use of various information technologies. Similar workshops and training courses are also offered by branch libraries of Toronto Public Library System.

95 STAFFING

In many of the university and public libraries, majority of staff work part time. Many of them happen to be students; who work part time in libraries to support themselves and carry on their studies. Part time workers often work in a number of libraries on different days of the week. Full time employees are employed on contract basis, which may be for 3 or 4 years or more. Once the contract period is over, the person is assessed. If he is found up to the mark, then another contract may be signed, otherwise he is asked to quit and find another job. Whenever there is a financial crunch, then restructuring takes place, as a consequence, some employees are handed a pink slip and asked to find another job. Even otherwise

libraries follow hire and fire policy. If the work of the staff is unsatisfactory or violates discipline, he can be fired. Many of the projects are carried out by outside consultants employed on contract basis. It may be computerization of a library or restructuring of the library.

The libraries are run with minimum staff. Evening shifts or on holidays, most of the staff may be part time. University of Maryland (College Park, USA) has a large library school and a separate library serving 200 students and 30 faculty (full and part time), having a collection of over 60 thousand. On Saturdays, it is managed by a part-time person (a student of the library school), who issues and returns books etc and also gives reference service. Even the part-time workers are given full responsibility and do their job admirably. Whether it is a public library or university library, reference desk is always manned by some staff member, ready to provide help. In university libraries, a reference desk of the Central Library would have at least 3 or more persons to provide reference and information service during regular hours.

96 SECURITY SYSTEM

Entrance to libraries is user friendly. There are no attendants at the entrance. However, it is a normal practice to have hidden digital cameras, which record the movement of the users and staff. It is an excellent surveillance system, which is not noticeable, is very effective. Users and the staff know that they are under watch. The issue system is fully computerized with bar coding. In case, some reader takes out a book or any other document without getting it issued properly, then it will cause an alarm at the exit point. They also face the problem of loss of books or damage to books.

97 BUDGET CUTS

Washington State (USA) had serious financial problems around 2000-2001. Governor of the state and his officers proposed that the State Central Library be closed down to save money. The argument was that the information they needed for decision making was all available at a particular web site. Therefore, if the State Central Library is closed down, they would still be able to get along. However, they did not know that the site was designed and maintained by the State Library. Once the State Librarian and other professionals came to know about the decision and the argument advanced, they convinced the authorities about the fallacy. Thus, the State Library was saved. The fault lies with librarians, who are not able to properly educate the authorities about the useful role played by libraries in society.

98 DIGITAL AMNESIA

Digital amnesia is taking its toll. E-records are getting lost or damaged. The threat is real and becoming increasingly urgent. The storing of documents, files,

pictures etc in a digital format saves significant amount of space and also results in efficient approach to store and retrieve information. It also allows for unparalleled access to information. These records can vanish due to poor records-management. The data can get lost because of obsolescence factor. It sometimes happens that the hardware or software used to access these records may no longer be available or the current technology may not be compatible with earlier technology. For example, 1960 US Census information is stored on digital tapes that only one machine in Smithsonian Institution is able to access it. Therefore, the machine is kept under lock and key. Even this machine can break down permanently. Then, the records would be lost for ever.

It has been suggested that standard-based softwares be used and also adopt the policy of assuming periodic migration of records to newer digital formats that can be run on modern hardware, whenever necessary. However, this software has problems inherent in it. People who convert records electronically save it offline and store it. Then they forget to go back to the record to migrate it or refresh it, from time to time, whenever required. There is always a need to rebuild such resources continually; otherwise these are liable to be lost forever.

In addition, migration does not assure the integrity of the document. It has been found that some forms of digital storage, such as compact discs, start getting degrading after 30 years. Besides, migration of records to any new storage medium can result in further degradation. If a record has undergone 20 migrations to a new standard over a period of 50 years, then it is likely to become completely incomprehensible, especially when the content is multimedia and interactive, that is dependent on links with other documents and databases.[8] The best approach is to keep only those records that are worthy of preserving.

991 CENSORSHIP

According to ALA Library Bill of Rights, "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all point of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed and removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." Further it says that "Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment". Often, librarians get involved into controversies with authorities on book selection policy matters and use of websites (filtration of certain sites). Sometimes, librarians are asked to quit but there are organizations who support librarian on these issues. Progressive Group of Librarians is one such organization. It informs librarians about such matters through e-mails, asks them to register their protest to authorities through emails and other channels. Professional organizations also take up these matters.

992 DRESS CODE

The dress code was prescribed recently in Queens Borough (New York City).

Under the code, no open-toe sandles, no piercing of eyebrows (those having pierced eyebrows had to cover these with band-aid), no miniskirts (more than 10 cm over the knees), no T-shirts, and no-exposed tattoos were permitted in the Queen Borough Public Library.

993 FILTERING SOFTWARE

More than 2000 libraries in USA have installed filtering software on their computers to block hard core Websites on computers housed in their children sections. In the process of blocking pornographic sites, non-obscene sites, including the ones with medical information get filtered out. In addition, some sites, which are not appropriate for children, remain accessible to them. The technology available today is not perfect. Efforts need to be made to bring out technology that is perfect for the intended purpose.

994 DO WE NEED LIBRARIES?

I had detailed discussion with a faculty member, teaching business studies (MBA courses, etc) at the University of Maryland (USA). He told me that he has a PC and a printer in his office. Through LAN, he is connected to the University Library network, having access to its resources. The University has also provided him access to Internet from his office. All the information and data, that he needs for teaching and research is accessible to him at his desk. He mentioned that business studies (we call it management studies) is one area, where all significant reports, articles and books are all available on internet, whereby, one need not go to the libraries of the University system for day to day needs. Thus, he goes to the Central Library or other libraries sometimes to read magazines, newspapers or borrow novels or other material of general interest. What is disturbing is that researchers and teachers in some fields go to libraries less often. The question is how to bring them back to library. Is it necessary? Has the library become peripheral for such users? There are many areas of this kind. The problem is also relevant to our libraries.

995 NEW IMAGE

Library profession in USA and Canada is having a tough time. The image has taken a beating. Wall Street Journal (New York) conducted a survey. It ranked librarianship 245 out of the possible 250 jobs in its outlook section. There is a felt need in USA and Canada also to alter the perception.

Many members of society have a wrong image about libraries and librarians. Such people view libraries as depositories of dusty old books, manned by spinsters with a stern look. An effort is going on to create a new image of libraries and librarians. The aim being to establish the importance of libraries in the situation where budgets are tightening and tell the public those libraries are cool and fun places. Librarians are tired of the same old jokes. They want to make the

public feel that they are vibrant and enthusiastic people. Their job is not merely shelving and dusting of books, but more about connecting people with books and information, often necessary for the survival of the people. You can trust them; you would like them and feel that they are somebody to whom you can relate.

Effort is being made through media to project a new image. In this direction calendars are being produced with female librarians posing for these, showing smart, adventurous and sexy librarians. Only time will tell, how far these efforts will succeed.

996 CONCLUSION

Libraries in Western countries have a rich and long tradition of support from philanthropists and friends of the library. These have played an important role in the origin and evolution of public libraries. The same can be said about university libraries. The libraries have been fully computerized. For library users, digital libraries possibly represent the biggest advance in library research since the invention of card catalogue. The libraries are putting online their indexes, catalogues, texts of journals, books, manuscripts, photographs and other research materials (include fragile ones) as well as material representing heritage. As a consequence, the access of information has improved tremendously. Distance learning has become easier and convenient.

Libraries have been innovative in their approach, using new ideas and technology. Newer technologies have enabled the people with disabilities to use libraries effectively and efficiently, which would not have been possible otherwise. Screen readers and Braille access devices have been of great help for those who cannot see, read or handle conventional books.

Libraries in Western countries have their own problems. Library profession has a low standing among the various professions. There is an image problem. Big efforts are being made to change the image. The salaries are low comparatively speaking. Budget cuts during recent years have badly affected libraries leading to cut back of services. However, libraries are considered an important part of the community and get lot of support from the members.

At present, economies in USA and Canada are in bad shape. Unemployment is rising. This has resulted in resource crunch in libraries. Once the economies start improving, library situation shall also improve. Only then, the library profession is surely going to gain.

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