BEST PRACTICES ADOPTED IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The Paper discusses the modernization of College Libraries in India taken place during the latter half of the last century. It gives an account of the contribution of the University Grants Commission in terms of Reports, conduct of seminars ,workshops, financial assistance for replenishing collections, constructing library buildings, upgrading library services. The role of other national bodies like AIU, AICTE, NAAC and Library Networks also is described. This modernization facilitated their transformation into the 21st Century Academic Libraries. While explaining the special features of 21st Century Academic Library the land marks of the forward march like professional literature analysing the transitory period, New Five Laws of Library Science are indicated. The special features of 21st century academic libraries like library soft wares, retrospective conversion, digital library initiative are also discussed. The changing librarianship is explained emphasising the new competencies for library and information professionals. It is concluded that though the core work of libraries remain the same the old ways to carry them out are changed due to ICT applications. The library services too are enhanced and have become more effective. Explains NAAC's concern for quality of library practices as well as NACC's set of best practices in academic libraries. Some features which should have been included in the set meant for improving the services of the college libraries are being proposed here while evaluating the criteria of selection of the best academic libraries. Explaining Peter Brophy's comparison of academic libraries with an automobile industry for the purpose of quality of management with a set of indicators The paper provides a few examples of the best practices experienced in libraries in different situations by Indian library scientists like Dr. S.R. Ranganathan and others. It elaborates upon Prof. Tikekar's comment that blind imitation, false competition, status symbolism will not work and finally submits that best practices of British libraries and American Center Libraries operating in India should have been included for our purpose.

Keywords:.Best Praxtices, Twenty first Century Librarianship. Modernization of Libraries. College Libraries in India.

INTRODUCTION:

University Grants Commission has been striving for ensuring quality of higher education since its inception, and more so during last two decades. There has been tremendous surge in educational institutions coming up particularly after creation of All India Council of Technical Education AICTE in 1987. The surge is more in private sector which has opened flood gates in private sector institutions. Number of deemed universities and colleges which have come up recently needs assessment by higher educations experts. Now a days it has become a fashion to have a college of engineering and medical sciences. Norms have been flouted with impunity and how technical colleges are approved by AICTE is open secret.

In our country the higher education is increasingly very rapidly. In the academic year 1950 – 51 are 28 Universities, 578 colleges are there. At present 677 Universities, 35,539 colleges are there. The Table No. 1 shows the increasing particulars of Universities last 5 decades.

Table 1. Showing the Universities increasing particulars

Sl. No.	YEAR	UNIVERSITIES	COLLEGES	STUDENTS
1	1970-71	103	3,604	2.O
2	1980-81	133	4,722	2.8
3	1990-91	190	7,346	4.9
4	2000-01	256	12,806	8.4
5	2006-07	387	21,170	16.6
6	2012-13	677	35,539	25.9
7	2014-2015	760	40,296	30.8
8	2020-2021	1,113	43,796	39.2
9	2024-2025	1,270	70,000	59.6

Source: Press Information Bureau data citing the ASHA Portal 2024-2025

At present Out of 677 Universities 298 State Universities, 149 Deemed Universities, 60 Central Universities and 170 Private Universities are there. It will shown in the Table No.2

Table No: 2 Shows of Types of Universities

SL NO	CATEGORY	NO.
1.	State Universities	516
2.	Deemed universities	150
3.	Central Universities	57
4.	Private Universities	547
	Total	1,270

Source: https://www.ugc.gov.in/universitydetails

For such a huge number of academic institutions in India it needs efforts to bring quality in library services immediately. Joseph M. Juran says that 21st Century is devoted to 'quality' whereas 20th Century was for 'production'. We have to discuss the issue of quality to improve library customers' satisfaction. Higher educations experts are much concerned about quality of education provided by the universities and colleges in India. There is apprehension that education received in these institutions is not commensurate with the fees charged from the students. Education experts feel that this is cheating with the people. It is because of this reason Government of India, UGC and NAAC are seriously concerned as to how to improve standards of education and establish best practices in the universities and colleges and their libraries.

DEFINITION OF BEST PRACTICES

ODLIS (Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science) describes best practices as follows:

"In the application of theory to real-life situations, procedures that, when properly, applied consistently yield superior results and are therefore used as reference points in evaluation of the effectiveness of alternative methods of accomplishing the same task. Best practices are identified by examining empirical evidence of success."

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes 'best practices as quality of high standard, excellence, highly improved, outstanding, par excellence service. It means way of doing something that is usual or expected way in a particular organization or situation, guidelines for good practices. In this process of developing best practices we take action rather than good ideas, and we improve our skills.'

REPORTS OF COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES

Fortunately, the Education Commission Reports like Radhakrishnan (1948) and Kothari (1964) have recognized the significant role of libraries in higher education and recommended strongly their all round development. Dr. C D Deshmukh and Dr. S R Ranganathan have provided a firm foundation for academic libraries in the form of 1959 (Pub. in 1965) Report of the Library Committee of the UGC. Such Reports are harbingers of all round development of academic libraries. A glaring example of the University of Delhi, which is holding this International Conference, can be cited. The Delhi University Library was officially surveyed by Carl

M White, *Programme Specialist in Library Administration, the Ford Foundation,* and submitted his Report to the then Vice Chancellor, Dr. C D Deshmukh, in 1965. The recommendations in the Report touch on almost all the core and related aspects of such a Premier University Library, located in the capital of the country. The Report kept before other University Libraries in the country a model of a University Library.

M.A. Gelfand's book, *University Libraries For Developing Countries*, published in 1965 by UNESCO in its *Series: Unesco Manuals for Libraries*, needs a special mention here as it throws in many innovative ideas for the development of University Libraries. As the book is specially written for University Libraries in Developing countries like India, it has a great significance in the forward march of University Libraries. Coming from an International body like UNESCO it has certainly influenced the Governments of developing countries to promote and support the cause of University Libraries.

DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The various library development schemes of the UGC during last over fifty years; ranging from grants for infrastructural facilities along with those for replenishing library collections, launching and implementing various activities and programmes through INFLIBNET to the sanction of special grants for upgrading library facilities, have kept the academic libraries in the country in shape and services. The efforts of national bodies like Association of Indian Universities (AIU), All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NACC), and some individual States and Universities too have contributed to this development in terms of formulation of some norms and guidelines for their effective functioning. The Planning Commission, Professional Associations like ILA and IASLIC and State and Central Governments have also their share in this development. City and national level Library Networks too have accelerated the pace of the development of academic libraries in their own ways. The National Knowledge Commission of Govt. of India's Report on Libraries entitled, *"Libraries, Gateways to Knowledge: A Roadmap for Revitalization "* published in 2007 also directs the future development of an academic library.

A MODERN ACADEMIC LIBRARY

A perception of a modern academic library in India started emerging notionally from 1931, the year of the publication of Dr. Ranganathan's revolutionary book, *"Five Laws of Library Science".* This book could be aptly called *The book of the Millennium* in our field due to its immense impact and influence on Libraries and Librarianship.

Quite a few changes were effected since then. The old concept of the *book centred librarianship* was changed to the *reader centred librarianship.* New ideas like open access, reference service, library cooperation, documentation and information services were emerged and settled, paving the way of future developments. The old concept of library service limited to a single library has undergone a phenomenal change extending it beyond the four walls of a library. Ranganathan's innocuous fourth law, '*Save the time of Reader'* has assumed new meaning, introducing an idea of instantaneous library service, now seen brought into practice with the help of various manifestations of ICT.

National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) and Best Practices

University Grants Commission created a higher education body (whose job is to assess the quality of university and college institutions) in 1994 in Bangalore on the recommendation of National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1986. This is National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) which strives for quality and excellence in higher education and advocates for enhancing the role of library and Information Services in improving academic environment. Document prepared by NAAC for "Best Practices in Academic Libraries says : "Best practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impact on organizations. "NAAC developed a set of best practices followed in academic libraries and presented under the following four broad areas:

1. Management and Administration of Library.
2. Collection and Services.
3. Extent of User Services.
4. Use of Technology.

A database of documented practices is available on NAAC website and they assure that regular updating will be made with consultations on contributing institutions. For college libraries NAAC has developed the following set of best practices for college libraries:

- Computerization of library with standard software.
- Inclusion of sufficient information about the library in the college prospectus.
- Compiling student / teacher statistics
- Displaying newspaper clippings and a clipping file maintained periodically.
- Career/ employment information services
- Internet facility to different user groups
- Information literacy programmes
- Suggestion Box
- Displaying New Arrivals
- Conduct book exhibition on different occasions
- Organizing book talks
- Instituting Annual Best Use Award for students
- Organizing competitions annually
- Conduct user survey periodically

However the above set of best practices for college libraries prepared by NAAC can not be termed as the last word. The following set of practices too should have been included in it.

- Making of a Path Finder to the library
- Keeping the library premises neat and clean
- Compiling a list of Current Serials/ catalogue of journals.
- Updating and maintaining library website
- Maintaining useful statistics regarding the use of the library and displaying them on the library walls
- Compiling checklists on different subject/topics as a part of documentation service
- Library Committee formation

- Distribution of useful handouts

A 21ST CENTURY ACADEMIC LIBRARY

The new environment obtained by the introduction of information and communication technologies is well described by a phrase, *Twenty First Century*. All the three important processes of the scholarly world, viz., generation, organization and dissemination of information and knowledge were subject to constant change since 1980s. Medias were changed for recording, preserving and disseminating information and knowledge. Libraries became multi media centres of information resources, leaving behind their dull and drab image of repositories of old dusty books! Materials like microforms, audio and video cassettes and now various electronic products for use both *off line* and *on line* representing *born digital and converted digital documents* are changing the faces of stack rooms and reading areas. This special type of material needs special equipment of different makes for their effective use. The combine of computer and communication technologies introduced a series of changes in the functioning and services of academic libraries. These changes are so substantial as not to spare any area or process in the library from them. The entire library is, more or less, put on scrutiny for change to avoid repetition and redundancy, time lag and delay in the whole working of the library, by new and novel combinations and linkages possible due to the application of technology. This ICT based phase of library development has resulted into not only extending the access of library users to the documents extensively but also quick retrieval of bibliographical and textual information. The erstwhile concepts of storage, various sections based on the types of the library material, technical processes and reader's services, work flow, and staffing pattern too are warranting a fresh look. The library management is becoming more integrated than before.

A 21st Century Academic Library is the one which could assimilate these changes to the benefit of all the concerned: the organizers of the Library, the users of different kinds and the library staff.

21ST CENTURY LIBRARIANSHIP

Professional literature available on this transitory period of the development of academic libraries in USA and UK well describes the features of the 21st Century Librarianship. The following two documents published by National Professional Associations can be cited in support of this. *1. Redesigning Library Services, A Manifesto, by Michael Buckland, ALA, Chicago, 1992* and *2.The Library in the 21st Century, New Services for the Information Age, by Peter Brophy, Library Association Publishing, London, 2001.* The individual University Libraries have drawn modernization or automation plans, and completed them in phases. As for technological advances libraries formed Electronic Networks, joined Consortia and brought them in their libraries. Institutions like 'Friends of Libraries', and 'Alumni Associations' helped raising funds for modernizing some. Professional bodies like SCONUL in UK and Research Library Group (now merged with OCLC) & ACRL a division of ALA in US played an important role in directing and monitoring these developments. Library staff including student assistants have been trained in applying new technologies to library routines and operations. Library users too were taken into confidence while effecting these changes in libraries. Traditional methods are replaced by new ones without much ado. In the developed countries this change over in academic libraries was possible without any hassles due to external forces like computer

literacy and technological applications in different walks of life.

NEW FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

It is interesting to note that modernization of academic libraries initiated from the promulgation of Ranganathan's *Five Laws of Library Science,* in 1931 reached a stage well described by New Five laws of Library Science formulated by Michael Gorman, the past President of ALA, along with Walt Crawford in 1995. which have given new meanings to Ranganathan's Five Laws in the changing situations.

They are:

1. Libraries serve humanity.
2. Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated.
3. Use technology intelligently to enhance service.
4. Protect free access to knowledge, and
5. Honour the past and create the future

FEATURES OF 21ST CENTURY ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

The academic libraries as such are varied in nature, subject areas, and sizes too. One model or road map for moving towards their 21st century versions may not work. However, some issues common to most of them may be specified as *special feature of the 21st Century Libraries.* They are as follows:

1. **Library Softwares:** Organization of an academic library on modern lines, its up gradation and / or automation starts with selection of a suitable library software. It is experienced that proper professional guidance in this behalf is not available to libraries and their authorities. There are four patterns in this regard:

i) There are a number of cases where the library software is prepared by the Computer Dept./ Section of the Institution itself. In this sense it is *'institutional'*, and all requirements of libraries are not met by them. The libraries have no choice other than going ahead with this ineffective and incomplete library software. Though these library soft wares are better than the ones downloaded and used from those freely available on INTERNET they are not improved or upgraded as per growing needs and they are responsible for the non performance of many a new activity.

ii) The softwares of the Library Networks made available free or at concessional rates to its members. Though the Networks initially do take pains to make them more professional than those of the Institutions, they at times cannot meet adequately customization needs of individual libraries. They also lack the service base and trouble shooting assistance, when needed.

iii) *Commercial* library soft wares are promoted with marketing skills. Though quality of some of them is good they are expensive for smaller libraries. A survey of academic libraries of moderate size in Mumbai reveals a very dismal situation in this behalf. Quite a few libraries had to go in for a new software abandoning the old within a short time for several reasons! Multilingual collections, professional procedures, library transactions … are not given proper attention in some. The Annual Maintenance Contracts are quite hefty and their non payments lead to lack of up grades,.

iv) *Open Source* library soft wares have entered on the scene of late offering a new alternative. The tag of '*a*

free library software' attracts many small and large libraries to it. For its smooth and uninterrupted use a lot of planning including financial is necessary, in addition to the essential competence of the library staff to operate it on their own.

Library Softwares, in fact, should facilitate both library operations and library services and enhance their scope, periodically. If use of software limits both, it hinders the development of the library. Library software is a one time purchase and it is basic for automation and up gradation. All the concerned should be aware of this. The technological versions as dos based, window based, linux based, web enabled … have their respective merits. They are much related to the computer configuration available and maintained in the library. Due attention should be given to this factor too and avoid future deadlocks!

Library softwares help integrate different tasks of a library saving time and simplifying procedures. Moreover by using certain modules of the software libraries can do many more house keeping tasks like stock verification and generating various reports. Electronic security systems too are integrated with it. The library professionals should get themselves acquainted with these varied potentialities of library soft wares and make maximum use of them for the benefit of their clientele.

2. **Retrospective Conversion:** With a view to achieving the visible impact of technological applications the entire collections of the library are required to be brought in their range. Many academic libraries have to struggle for this necessary exercise. The staff on the establishment is not in a position to carry out this work of backlog. 'Out sourcing' is a way out. But it is unfortunate that due importance is not given to this work and it is got done hurriedly not following the professional norms. This leaves the library weak in retrieval of the material it has in its stock. A large number of documents in the stock remain hidden from potential users. A common observation is that due attention is not given to the assignment of the subject descriptors which is considered to be one of the core professional skills. Free text search or scores of keywords search result into frustration of users. Meeting subject approach to documents needs professional touch

3. **Electronic Resources:** These are the digitally born or converted books, journals and other records. Showpieces, a few years ago, are now occupying a prominent place in academic libraries. They do have an edge over the print material in saving space and in easy and quick transfer, both on line and off line. Use of growing number of e books and e journals moves a library towards its 21st Century character. Joining a *Consortia* for increasing the ability of the library to offer its readers an opportunity to browse a wide range of journals is a new version of resource

sharing. The IFLA NET web site gives a long list of electronic products. It is left with the Librarians of academic libraries to take advantage of such products and serve their clients in their studies and research. Library professionals' competency of removing chaff from wheat grants them recognition. As they know standard works in print media they should know standard, authentic, authoritative electronic resources representing individual or group of documents as well as data bases. Linkages and aggregates are special features of the electronic resources. Their knowledge with licence tags is a must for a library professional these days. While going in for electronic resources their perpetual availability on the Library Computer System should be underlined. Due attention should be given to it while signing agreements or MOUs before subscribing to them.

A digital section of the academic library is the first in this direction. It can slowly be developed by providing with the necessary infrastructural facilities in the Library itself. New additions in this section will keep it more used day by day. The new ideas like Institutional Archives can be undertaken with the start of such digital library sections. This encourages to have a dynamic Library Website catering to the campus and outside campus spread clientele remote library services.

4. **Reader Friendly Organizational Pattern:** As Dr. Schwartz pointed out above the organizational pattern of academic libraries needs change. The Library should be run as a Service Organization and not as an administrative office! The present management in most of the libraries is more restrictive than reader friendly. Library timings, library rules and regulations, library facilities … all need a fresh look in the changing environment. Academic libraries are functioning along with other activities of the Institution. If they want to be the integral part of the Institution they have to adjust with other activities as well as to maintain their identity, and their exclusive services. Their role is that of a facilitator of achieving the high goals of these Institutions of Higher Education. As for students they are in the Institutions for a limited period and libraries have to pull them under their valuable influence by catering to their various study and research needs effectively. For researchers Academic Library is an invisible *Guide, Friend and Philosopher*. Managerial restrictions limiting facilities for no reason harm this image of the Library. Class rooms and library reading places have distinct features. However, the library in its entirety: stack rooms, reading areas, computer installations, service designated sections … should serve as the extension of the class rooms and teachers rooms. For this all necessary gadgets, new equipments, modern facilities in every respect should find place in the Library. The changing organizational pattern implies this.

5. **Transforming Traditional Libraries into the 21st Century ones:** The onus of transforming traditional libraries into the 21st Century ones mainly falls on their librarians. There is a lot of preparatory work to be carried out by the library behind the counter so as to serve readers well. This work is of technical and professional nature. All the work involved like procurement, technical processing, preparing a document for circulation, and actual lending transactions has undergone changes. Publishers' websites, Virtual Book Stores are pouring information of varied nature. Using these resources is a sign of moving with times. INTERNET Resources are at the services of all but librarians can use them as tools for better services to readers. Bibliographical and reference services too can be extended more promptly and precisely. There are quite a few

professional websites useful as companions to library professionals. An example of such a web site, *"Researching Librarian: web resources helpful for librarians doing research"* can be mentioned here. Such professional web sites do assist to know and possess new competencies required for heading a 21st Century academic library.

A few Examples of Experience of Best Practices in Academic and Research Libraries

1. Dr. S. R. Ranganathan writes that he brought to the notice of Sir C.V. Raman about Raman Effect which was published in a foreign journal. This incident happened in Madras University Library in early thirties. Sir C.V. Raman received the Nobel Prize for his work on the scattering of light which is called Raman scattering or Raman Effect.

2. Mr. T.N. Chaturvedi, former Governor of Karnataka narrated the experience about when he approached Prof. D.N. Marshall, Librarian Bombay University for a book from his Library. Prof. Marshall sent him the book immediately without waiting whether his library rules permitted him or not. Mr. T.N. Chaturvedi wrote to many university libraries. He received negative reply from them saying that they have the book in the library but their rules do not permit them to send the book

3. Prof. PK. Mehta, former Pro Vice-chancellor of IGNOU narrates the incident in 1970 when he wrote to Dr. B. Anderson, Librarian of Bombay University Library that he would like to make use of the library and mentioning his area of research work. Prompt reply came from Dr. B. Anderson. Prof. Mehta went to the library and met the librarian immediately. Dr .B Anderson gave him three typed papers and told, " This is the list of books available in our library which, I think are relevant to the area of your work " and told him please feel free to contact me if you have any difficulty or need of any assistance. Prof. PK. Mehta spent few weeks in the library. Prof. PK. Mehta comments"A library is provision and every provision in judged on the basis of three parameters: *Availability Accessibility and Utilization.*

The above examples are just a few, and there might be many more such examples of different libraries experienced by our library professionals. What common thing we found in the above incidents is the promptness as well as the thorough knowledge of the library resources by librarians which the library clients appreciated. Even sending a prompt reply to any letter could be considered as best practices. The clients want how much efforts we have put in providing service to them.

CONCLUSION

In the process of achieving best practices in libraries, Prof. A.C. Tikekar warns us "Blind imitation, false competition and status symbolism do not work well. Ad hocism too does not accomplish the desired goal. Ill planned radical change would prove costly and unwieldy. At the same time both resistance and or reluctance to accept the inevitable changes will be harmful to development of libraries." It is suggested to UGC /NAAC that the best practices followed in British Libraries and American Center Libraries operating in India should have been taken into account. There are areas which we have not been able to find out as best practices. A few examples of such areas are: index to periodicals, real time reference service, preparation of various statistics of the use of e-resources and many other areas. The past history of libraries indicates that libraries have

adopted contemporary technologies and moved ahead with times. The present changes are, however, fast and libraries are finding it difficult to keep pace with them. They need financial and administrative support from different agencies to meet the new situation. For transforming our traditional academic libraries into 21st Century libraries worth the nomenclature library professionals need be oriented to the newly emerging areas of the profession. It is encouraging to find individual Universities coming forth to provide library professionals similar opportunities through refresher courses, seminars and workshops. The core functions of Libraries, according to him, have remained the same, viz. collection, organization and dissemination of information and knowledge. The ways to carry them out, however, are undergoing change due to application of ICT. This applies aptly to academic libraries and librarianship too.

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