

## The emergence of virtual library: A paradigm shift in knowledge resource management

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### Abstract

The contention of this paper is that we are right amidst a crisis of identity of the roles of the library and librarian due to the fundamental changes in knowledge providing services world over because of digitalization. It is announcing the end of the road for the traditional concept of library and the role of all powerful librarians, who are thus far ranked very high in the echelons of academic hierarchy. Library is escaping from the clutches of librarians. Library will not exist as a place for storing, organizing and making easily available knowledge for the research student. Library will be an undefined space where the research scholar would wade through the web and through the good search engines, would locate and download the material required by him in the digital form while being leisurely seated at his convenient abode, only linked to the system. These tremendous changes have necessitated the redefining of the limited role of a library. This state of affairs is already a reality in advanced countries. Even in Indian institutions of higher learning within next 10-20 years we all would be taken by the whirlwind of digitalization or we will fall out of the race of the world academic platform if we don't act. It is time to redefine or sing requiem to the library science.

**Keywords:** Virtual library, e-books, e-journals, Libraries of future, Role of librarian, Role of libraries.

### Introduction

Rita Singh of the Sharda University Noida, writing in 2010 as regards the urgency of equipping the higher education in India in HRD to be able to come to world standards wanted that the reform should start immediately by qualifying the Indian libraries and librarians in digitalization. She was visualizing that we need the libraries as agencies of information collection, organization and diffusion was a permanent reality.<sup>1</sup>

However, today precisely this role of the libraries of being agencies of collecting, organizing and diffusing information is put in question as the vast knowledge that is available on the web cannot and need not be downloaded into a library hub for the students to use it. It would be simply an exercise in futility as every day every subject under heaven undergoes modifications, corrections and change; and contributions on that field keep updating from all over. As the computer systems and other electronic gadgets today have become cheap and affordable and the telephone rates are slashed the need of libraries and the librarians is superseded.

Gone are the days when you would find a hungry exhausted looking young man arriving early at the gate of the library, week after week, and rushing to take his seat behind a long desk with a load of books piled up in the library, and wading through them greedily to join a word to a word, to produce his research paper and earn his academic credentials.

Today with the emergence of so-called electronic/virtual library e-library for short, we have made unprecedented shift in providing knowledge resources to the research scholar or even a casual reader. In the bargain we are redefining radically the roles.

The library was a fixed concept as a deposit of up-to-date knowledge on a topic. It was supposed to have widest possible collection on a subject. Year by year huge elenchus

were published by institutes of higher knowledge on the latest publications on a particular subject. The library was investing huge amounts to acquire the copies before the stock ran out. They even had regular contract with known publishing houses to furnish their publications urgently and preferentially to their library.

The library was also a place of easy access to the knowledge material. The catalogues of the books on various aspects at the lobby of a library assured him of the resources in a very short time. The easier the access was to the study material, the more valued was the library. Again the systems and procedures were perennially updated to cater to the requirements of the prospective research scholar so that with ease he could lay hands on the all the latest or required books and articles.

The library was a material and tangible reality. It was the world of printed books and periodicals and journals that contained the articles. This needed lot of budgetary allocations to safe keep, maintain safe from climatic and pest related damages, as well as from unscrupulous library users who would desperately misuse the books or rob them.

Hence the role of the librarian was paramount. The librarian had to see to all these aspects as well as be the watchman and guard so that library discipline be maintained and bonafide users were not disturbed or denied the use of the library. Given the plethora of information and the ramification of the science and knowledge today it is impossible for any human librarian to provide any worthwhile information on books and journals on a subject. Thus once the greater part of the study material is digitalized and is available on the net, the role of the librarian is no more of an academic one but merely that of a storekeeper or care taker or a supervisor of the library edifice.

As the e libraries emerge, all these sacrosanct and solid concepts of library today will have become fluid; and we are

almost looking into the deep empty space of the possible disuse and disappearance of the libraries as we have them. In not a distant future the libraries of printed books will be simply deposits of printed material or old CDs and unusable filmstrips kept safe for a rare die hard researcher who may have a project for historical investigation of the accumulated material that has not yet been redone digitally. Even in such context, the PDF version of such material will be available in the Cloud computing for a price.

It means the actual library would be no more a place frequented by a research scholar but just a deposit of archives and the librarian would be a mere curator of these 'ancient' no doubt precious printed books or manuscripts. The simple reason is that the fundamentals have changed.

First, the digitalized books do not require shelves and storage space. A research student wherever he is simply needs a modem to access the web, computer systems and terminals to request a search engine like Google to locate up-to-date knowledge on a subject. The research scholar is the king. He can get what he needs and not what is on offer in a particular library, limiting the outcome of his research due to the unavailability of the material in a particular institute of learning.

Secondly, so many libraries and e commerce establishments have digitalized ancient books and journals and they retain with them the copyright and do not make them available free in public domain. If so there is no reason why the research scholar has at all to leave his home and make a voyage to any library. He can very well have the necessary apparatus at his residence and at his convenience and be hooked to the web and down load material for free or for payment and work on the paper.

Thirdly the down loaded material is well ordered; and the complicated and time consuming obligation of documenting the citations with footnotes is easily done automatically. That fact cuts drastically the time required to bring out a research paper and make it more reliable. He can also check with new innovative apps that are perennially are on offer, to know if the material at hand is authentic, plagiarized or spurious and doubly be sure of the worth of the work done.

Further, the various search engines as well as the lists of recent material for digitalized books and journals can be had at least in a summary for free in various blogs and you can be not only sure your contribution is not merely repetition or reinventing the wheel all over again for no purpose. You can further a step where others have left incomplete. That is deeply satisfying for a research scholar.

Dr. Manoj Kumar Sinha, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Library and Information Science (Swami Vivekananda School of Library Sciences) Assam University in his article See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication cited below already sounds the bugle for a change of our attitudes. He touches on various aspects of the problem.<sup>2</sup>

E library is a virtual space a hub of digitalized study material emanating from all sources concerned with that particular subject and its ramifications. Shortly there will

not be someone who would or can master a subject as the updating is made easy for a scholar; he can start his research to advance the subject where others have left. He can do it without delay as he has all the disciplinary or interdisciplinary material at finger tips, literally.

E library is also topic specific. The search engines have improved so much today that they not merely list alphabetically or chronologically the study material available to them. They can offer problem specific material to the research scholar that helps him on a particular sub issue of a main topic.

E Library is available round the clock and round the year. That is an unprecedented quantum jump. The student was at the mercy of the horarium of the library and sometime at the mercy or good will of the librarian. He could have been denied the use of it for even a flimsy reason. He had to be very docile and falling in line with all the library rules. This big hurdle is set aside. Now whenever the scholar has time or perhaps even a mood to work, he can on his system and get working, provided there is the electricity supply. This makes the research a satisfying enjoyment than a burden and even a torture.

It is less cumbersome as it has the references and footnotes or endnotes accompanying it. One of the ordeals of a research scholar was the citation of the sources exactly as the research paper rules demand. Often one could miss a part of the text or the page number or miss read the name of the author or the year and place of publication. All these problems are passé, as the new apps give a student correct foot notes for the citations without any effort. It cuts the total time required for the work and makes the work really satisfying as it is quite comprehensive as one has used the best and up-to-date resources. It saves your time as well as your money.

Another great advantage of E library is that it cuts distances and time of travel. Due to traffic travel is an ordeal especially at the peak hours of the day. In the traditional library one had to mercilessly wade through the traffic and arrive at the library gate. Naturally one was drained of energy and exhausted even before commencing the work. You had so many other restrictions' of food and carrying other materials into the library reference section. All these have disappeared. The scholar today can just sit in his house and enter into the virtual space of the library understood as the web that supplies access to the various e study material whether they are books, journals, souvenirs or just research papers that are available on line free or for a price.

A research scholar has to consult his guide time to time and interact with him. With the blessings of web, be it web reserved for the closed circle in the institute, or open to all the scholars, he can get into touch with his moderator at the time assigned by the moderator any time of the day or night by interface and conferencing on the web. It is very effective and makes the research a joy.

It admits interdisciplinary research approach more easily as it can easily furnish you with related material much beyond your imagination and extent of your knowledge or the librarian's knowledge.

Pushing the argument a little further there is an opinion that the future search engines will be able to produce research on accumulated documents on their own such a way that many doctorates would be redundant, obsolete and useless. The question is will this web and other cyber apps can replace human mind and its efforts to find solutions and answers to questions.

However, the fears of the cyber world attacking and dominating the human intelligence are immature it seems too farfetched. Hence, it must be affirmed solemnly that neither so-called Artificial/ mechanical Intelligence (AI) or any computer or any website will ever be capable of dominating free human mind. Human mind has a complex system of motivation levels whereby a same action started for one purpose can be redirected many times to arrive at a totally different goal. This however is not true of a mechanical brain. A machine qua machine, will never succeed to have it on its own, unless it has been programmed there in. It is said Albert Einstein was afraid of the day when the machines might enslave human minds. They do if you allow them. The good news is that you can outsmart them. It is just because the computer program is the fixed invention of a single individual or of a group of human minds put together. The computer can faithfully do what is asked in multiplying the function many times and may surprise us but not replace the creative human mind which makes the program.<sup>3</sup>

In 1997, the Deep Blue computer defeated the reigning world chess champion Kasparov coolly, without any emotion. The unexpected and historical Victory meant nothing to the computer. It can speed up and multiply functions of human intelligence. However even to say it is rejoicing at the victory has to be programmed into it by a human mind. So it is never the machine but human mind will remain the supreme unless we are stupid to allow the machine and it's programmed functioning to take over us. We can only be enslaved by another mind with intelligence and volition not by computer.<sup>4</sup>

The bad news is that the digitalized knowledge that today is damn cheap is cornered by a few commercial houses with ulterior commercial motivation. However, knowledge, like the time is money, and we live today in a highly commercialized and profiteering greed everywhere. As any quality material is to be paid, a day may not be far that any serious study will have to pay royalty to these commercial houses making select, well-organized and easy to use knowledge accessible only to the richest. In such a dispensation, it will not be difficult to do a research as greater part of the hard work of research will have been done by the search and organize engines with all the

required formalities including acknowledgement and citation.

By way of conclusion it can be said that the age-old role of libraries as supplier of knowledge will be a too narrow a concept for the library and the librarian as the digitalization takes over our lives. Though there will still be printed material and media around for quite some time more, the rate is coming drastically down. It survives more in the field of newspapers and cheap popular journals with limited readership where the digitalization has not made inroads. Hence it is surmised that library has the future more in terms of being a part of HRD than as an autonomous science and subject. HRD is about providing people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and training that enables them to perform effectively. HRD encompasses staff development and training, continuing professional development/ continuing professional education and workplace. HRD motivates the existing professional and employees and create a favorable psychological climate and environment. It also helps in the long run to reduce the costs of production in various industries and institution. As we all know that information plays a very important role in development agenda as tomorrow is built on the today and yesterday, knowing the contributions of the past is essential even to empirical and pure science researches, and that an adequate information infrastructure is therefore essential.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Conflict of Interest**

None.

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