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From tradition to transformation: The journey of school librarianship in India

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ABSTRACT

Background: This article delves into the rich tapestry of school librarianship in India, spanning from its ancient origins to its contemporary state. The study employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining historical analysis, cultural insights, and educational perspectives to unravel the nuanced development of school libraries and the roles of librarians within them.

Discussion: Beginning with the ancient Indian tradition of Gurukuls, where oral transmission of knowledge was paramount, one can trace the evolution of early libraries and the revered "Guru-Pustakalaya" (teacher's library) as the precursor to formal school libraries. The medieval era witnessed the advent of Persian and Arabic manuscripts, leading to the establishment of Madrasas and Maktab libraries, which contributed to the dissemination of diverse knowledge. The colonial period introduced Western educational ideals and the establishment of missionary schools, thereby reshaping the landscape of school librarianship with the introduction of modern library systems and practices.

In the post-independence era, the Indian government took significant steps to promote literacy and education, resulting in the proliferation of school libraries across the nation. The article explores the transformative impact of technology, the digital age, and the changing role of school librarians as facilitators of information literacy and digital resources.

Conclusion: This comprehensive historical analysis sheds light on the continuum of school librarianship in India, emphasizing its pivotal role in education and knowledge dissemination throughout the ages. Understanding this evolution is essential for shaping the future of school libraries and librarianship in India, adapting to the changing educational landscape and information needs of the 21st century.

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1. Introduction

The development of school librarianship in India over the centuries, from its beginnings during the colonial era to its current prominence in the field of education, is a fascinating story that spans a great deal of time. While the exact name of the first school librarian in India may always remain shrouded in historical mystery, the introduction of organized school libraries has unquestionably had a lasting effect on the educational system of the country.¹⁻⁵

The beginning of the school libraries takes place during the British Raj's impact on the Indian subcontinent. The idea of school libraries was established as part of the larger educational changes with the emergence of British educational systems. These early libraries sought to introduce British literature and ideas to the Indian populace while primarily serving the requirements of British officials and the affluent. The foundations of school librarianship started to take shape in this setting, with people in charge of overseeing these collections and facilitating access to instructional resources.⁶⁻⁸

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The function of school libraries changed as India progressed through its war for freedom to reflect its own culture. Libraries evolved became crucial centers for the dissemination of information about Indian history, culture, and the nationalism spirit. This change was a turning point in the development of school librarianship, as librarians began to see their jobs as facilitators of a greater educational experience rather than just as bookkeepers. These libraries were crucial tools for bringing about social and political change, enabling thinkers and students to participate in the nation's liberation movement.^{9–12}

After India gained its independence in 1947, the development of school libraries underwent yet another significant change. The government provided funding to create school libraries across the nation because it understood the value of education in fostering a strong nation. During this time, school libraries significantly increased in number and school librarianship became a profession. The breadth of librarians' responsibilities grew to encompass not only managing collections but also assisting students with research, information literacy, and the use of digital resources as they started to obtain formal training and education in library science.

The problems and opportunities facing school librarians in India have changed in the era of globalization and technological growth. Traditional libraries have evolved into dynamic learning environments with digital resources, e-books, and online databases as a result of the digital revolution. School librarians are now responsible for instructing students on how to use technology for research and learning, critically analyze material, and navigate this digital world.

In India nowadays, school librarians are essential collaborators in the educational process. They are essential in advancing literacy, encouraging a love of reading, and giving children the knowledge and abilities they need to succeed in the information age. Beyond acting as stewards of knowledge, they are teachers, mentors, and mentors who make a substantial contribution to students' overall growth.

2. Early Beginnings

In ancient India, education was highly regarded, and knowledge was considered a valuable asset. Early school libraries, known as "Gurukuls" and "oral libraries," played a crucial role in the dissemination of knowledge and the education system of the time.

1. **Gurukuls:** Gurukuls were the earliest form of educational institutions in ancient India. These were traditional centers of learning, where students lived with their gurus (teachers) in a close-knit environment. Gurukuls were usually situated in serene and natural surroundings, away from the bustling cities. The term "Gurukul" itself signifies the teacher's home (Guru -

teacher, Kul - home). These are considered as the first example of school education in India.

2. **Library Function:** Gurukuls had small libraries or repositories of knowledge, typically maintained by the guru or senior students. These libraries were not as extensive as modern libraries, but they held a collection of sacred texts, scriptures, manuscripts, and treatises relevant to the curriculum being taught. The guru would often impart knowledge from these texts orally, discussing and debating their contents with the students.
3. **Oral Tradition:** Oral transmission of knowledge was a prominent feature of Gurukuls. The guru would orally teach the students, reciting verses and explaining their meanings. This method ensured the preservation of the rich oral tradition of India, where knowledge was passed down through generations without the need for written texts.
4. **Manuscript Culture:** While Gurukuls relied heavily on oral instruction, some manuscripts were created and used for reference. These manuscripts were meticulously handwritten by scribes and students, and they contained valuable information on subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and literature.
5. **Oral Libraries:** In addition to Gurukuls, India had an extensive tradition of oral libraries, also known as "smriti" (remembered) literature. These were not physical libraries but rather a vast repository of knowledge preserved through oral tradition.
6. **Vedic Tradition:** The oldest and most well-known oral library in India was the Vedic tradition. The Vedas, including the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda, were passed down orally for generations. The memorization of these sacred texts was a rigorous and disciplined process, with students committing thousands of verses to memory.
7. **Epics and Puranas:** Other forms of oral literature included the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and various Puranas. These epics and Puranas contained mythological stories, moral teachings, and historical accounts, all preserved and transmitted orally.
8. **Local Traditions:** Apart from the major texts, each region and community had its own oral traditions, preserving folklore, local history, and cultural practices through storytelling and recitation.

These early school libraries and oral traditions were the backbone of education and knowledge dissemination in ancient India. They played a vital role in shaping the intellectual and cultural landscape of the subcontinent, contributing to the rich tapestry of India's ancient heritage. Despite the absence of modern libraries and written records, these ancient systems ensured the continuity and

preservation of knowledge for millennia.

3. The Colonial Influence

The establishment of school libraries in India can be traced back to the early 19th century, with notable instances like the one at the Hare School in Calcutta in 1818. This marked a significant milestone in the history of education and library development in India. David Hare, a prominent philanthropist and educationist, played a pivotal role in the creation of this school library. When he came to India he was deeply affected by the impoverished and appalling state of education in India.

1. **David Hare's Vision:** David Hare was a visionary who understood the importance of education and the role that libraries could play in fostering it. His vision extended beyond traditional educational methods, and he recognized the transformative potential of books and knowledge in shaping young minds.
2. **Establishment of the Hare School Book Society :** In 1818, David Hare established a School Book Society at the Hare School in Calcutta (now Kolkata). This society functioned like a school library. It was a pioneering effort, as it aimed to provide students with access to a wide range of books, fostering a culture of reading and learning. It was not merely a collection of books but a symbol of enlightenment and progress.
3. **Impact on Education:** While David Hare may not have been officially labeled as the first school librarian, his efforts were instrumental in promoting education and library development during that era. The Hare School Library served as a model for other educational institutions and inspired the creation of similar libraries across India.
4. **Promotion of Enlightenment:** Hare's library was more than just a repository of books; it was a hub for intellectual growth and enlightenment. Students could access a diverse range of literature, including textbooks, literature, and reference materials, which broadened their horizons and encouraged critical thinking.
5. **Legacy and Influence:** The Hare School Library marked the beginning of a trend where schools across India recognized the value of libraries as essential components of the education system. This trend continued to grow, leading to the establishment of countless school libraries throughout the country.
6. **Evolution of School Libraries:** Over the years, school libraries in India evolved to keep pace with changing educational needs and technological advancements. Modern school libraries offer not only physical books but also digital resources, online catalogs, and multimedia materials, catering to the diverse learning needs of students.

Colonial India bore witness to profound historical and cultural transformations, yet it often left many aspects of its rich heritage overlooked and under-documented. The David Hare School, established during the British colonial era, stands as a symbol of this complex history. Its library, a repository of knowledge and enlightenment, echoes the silence that pervades much of Indian history—a notable absence of mention of the school librarian. In a country renowned for its ancient libraries, scriptures, and scholars, the role of a school librarian, despite its undeniable significance, remains a curious omission. It underscores the broader narrative of colonial India, where the preservation and representation of indigenous traditions and figures were often subjugated by the imperial lens. Acknowledging this void in the annals of Indian history prompts a deeper reflection on the untold stories and overlooked heroes who contributed to the intellectual tapestry of the nation during this pivotal period.

4. Post-Independence Progress: The Role of Government Initiatives

Post-independence India witnessed significant progress in various sectors, and the role of government initiatives in promoting education, particularly through the expansion of school libraries, played a crucial part in this transformation.

1. **Context of Independence:** In 1947, when India gained independence from British colonial rule, the country faced numerous challenges. One of the pressing issues was the need for comprehensive education system to foster national development and social progress. The newly-formed government realized that education was the key to empowering its citizens and building a prosperous nation.
2. **Emphasis on Education:** The government recognized that education was a fundamental tool for social upliftment and economic growth. It aimed to provide quality education to all, regardless of socio-economic background, and thereby promote equality and inclusive development.
3. **Importance of Reading Culture:** Understanding that education was not limited to classrooms, the government realized the importance of inculcating a reading culture among students. Reading not only enhances knowledge but also promotes critical thinking, creativity, and a broader perspective on life.
4. **School Libraries as Catalysts:** To promote reading and facilitate access to a wide range of educational resources, the government embarked on initiatives to expand school libraries. School libraries were seen as catalysts for fostering a reading culture, improving students' comprehension skills, and supporting their overall intellectual development.

5. National Policy on Education (1968): The National Policy on Education, introduced in 1968, played a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of India. This policy outlined various strategies to improve the quality of education, with a particular focus on school libraries. It emphasized the need for well-equipped libraries in schools, which were envisioned as spaces where students could explore diverse literature and acquire a thirst for knowledge.
6. Infrastructure and Resources: Government initiatives also involved providing infrastructure and resources for school libraries. This included not only books but also magazines, newspapers, audio-visual materials, and trained librarians who could guide students in their reading pursuits.

Since India gained its independence, the evolution of school libraries has been a significant yet understated aspect of the education system. While various reports, journals, and articles have documented the transformation of educational infrastructure, curricula, and teaching methods, surprisingly, there remains a conspicuous absence of any substantial mention of school librarians. School libraries have transitioned from being rudimentary book depositories to vibrant hubs of knowledge, incorporating digital resources, multimedia materials, and fostering a culture of independent learning. They play an indispensable role in nurturing students' critical thinking, research skills, and information literacy. Despite this evolution, the omission of school librarians from academic discourse raises questions about their recognition and the need to acknowledge their pivotal contribution to shaping the educational landscape in India. The continued absence of discussions on school librarians in reports, journals, and articles in India is a missed opportunity to highlight the invaluable role these professionals play in promoting literacy and intellectual growth among students. In post-independence India, school libraries have evolved to adapt to changing technology and pedagogical approaches, aligning with the nation's aspirations for educational excellence. They have become not only repositories of knowledge but also spaces for collaboration, innovation, and the cultivation of a lifelong love for learning. It is essential for educational stakeholders and policymakers to recognize the essential role of school librarians in facilitating this transformation and to incorporate their contributions into the broader dialogue about the evolution of education in India. Such recognition would not only validate the tireless efforts of these educators but also enable them to further enhance the quality of education across the country.^{13–15}

5. 1970s-1980s: Emergence of Professional Librarianship

The 1970s and 1980s marked a pivotal period in the history of school librarianship, as it underwent a notable transformation in its perception, structure, and professionalism. Prior to this era, school librarianship was often regarded as an informal and unstructured activity, with individuals typically taking on the role without specific training or qualifications. However, several key developments during the 1970s and 1980s led to a more organized and professional approach to this field.

1. **Establishment of Library Science Schools and Training Programs:** One of the most significant changes during this period was the establishment of library science schools and specialized training programs. These institutions offered formal education and training for aspiring librarians, including those interested in school librarianship. As a result, individuals pursuing careers as school librarians could now receive a structured education that provided them with the knowledge and skills required for the job.
2. **Emergence of Qualified Librarians:** With the availability of formal education and training, a new generation of qualified school librarians began to emerge. These individuals possessed a deeper understanding of library science, information organization, and management principles. They were better equipped to handle the multifaceted responsibilities associated with running a school library effectively.
3. **Development of Cataloging Systems:** The 1970s and 1980s saw significant advancements in cataloging systems used in school libraries. The introduction of computerized cataloging systems revolutionized the way books and other resources were organized and made accessible to students and teachers. This technology not only improved the efficiency of library operations but also enhanced the overall user experience.
4. **Classification Schemes:** Alongside cataloging systems, there was a growing emphasis on the development and use of classification schemes tailored to the needs of school libraries. These schemes helped librarians categorize and arrange materials in a logical and user-friendly manner, making it easier for patrons to locate relevant resources.
5. **Library Management Practices:** The period witnessed the refinement of essential library management practices. School librarians became more adept at collection development, budget management, and resource allocation. They were also better equipped to collaborate with educators and integrate library resources into the curriculum,

supporting the educational goals of the school.

Despite library schools being opened and training programs being provided to become a librarian. There was no special school or program to become a trained school librarian. This scenario continues even today where there is no specialized course for school librarianship. The courses in library science does not cater to people aspiring to be school librarians. There is no course that equips one with required skill set or expertise one needs for the profession. The courses currently available only trains one in the basic skills of cataloguing and use of automation software. There is no training or instruction for the soft skills needed to deal with school children of different ages.

Digital Revolution in 20th century: Challenges and Opportunities

The late 20th century brought forth the digital revolution, transforming the landscape of school librarianship. The introduction of computers, internet access, and electronic resources opened new avenues for information dissemination. School librarians had to adapt to these changes by not only curating physical collections but also managing digital resources and teaching students about information literacy and online research skills.

The advent of the digital revolution in the late 20th century was nothing short of a paradigm shift in the field of school librarianship. As computers, internet access, and electronic resources became increasingly ubiquitous, the role of school librarians evolved to encompass a dynamic blend of traditional and digital responsibilities. This transformation not only presented a series of challenges but also offered an array of exciting opportunities that shaped the profession in profound ways.

One of the most conspicuous challenges that school librarians encountered in this new digital landscape was the need to transition from traditional book-based collections to managing and curating digital resources. This shift required a reimagining of how libraries functioned, as librarians had to not only select and organize physical books but also navigate the vast realm of digital content. The sheer volume and diversity of online resources posed an initial hurdle, necessitating the development of advanced cataloging and organizational systems to ensure easy access for students and faculty.

Another challenge that emerged was the demand for digital literacy education. School librarians found themselves in the role of educators, teaching students about information literacy and online research skills. With an abundance of information available at their fingertips, students needed guidance to critically evaluate sources, distinguish between reliable and unreliable information, and utilize search engines and databases effectively. This educational responsibility became an integral part of the librarian's role, reinforcing their significance in the academic development of students.

Despite these challenges, the digital revolution also brought forth a multitude of opportunities for school librarians. With the integration of technology, librarians had the potential to expand their reach beyond the physical confines of the library. They could curate online collections, collaborate with teachers to design digital learning resources, and participate in the development of e-learning platforms. This expansion of their roles allowed librarians to become essential contributors to the evolving educational landscape.

Moreover, the digital era enabled school librarians to engage in more personalized and data-driven approaches. They could use analytics to understand the reading preferences and needs of their students, tailoring recommendations and resources accordingly. This level of personalization facilitated a deeper connection between librarians and students, fostering a love for reading and learning.

The Digital Revolution not only posed challenges but also opened doors for school librarians to become advocates for equitable access to information. In an increasingly interconnected world, they played a vital role in bridging the digital divide, ensuring that all students had access to the digital resources required for their education. The digital Revolution ushered in a wave of challenges and opportunities for school librarians. It demanded adaptability and a willingness to embrace digital tools, while also emphasizing the critical importance of information literacy education. Through these challenges, librarians became key players in shaping the digital landscape of education, ensuring that students could thrive in a world overflowing with information. They evolved from traditional curators of books to digital navigators, educators, and advocates for knowledge accessibility, cementing their indispensable role in the modern educational ecosystem.

6. 21st Century Renaissance: Transformative Role of School Libraries

The 21st Century Renaissance of school libraries signifies a remarkable shift in their significance and purpose within the educational landscape. These dynamic transformations have catapulted them from mere repositories of books into thriving epicentres of intellectual growth and innovation. In this digital age, school libraries have become catalysts for change, playing an instrumental role in shaping the future of education.

The metamorphosis of school libraries is characterized by a departure from their conventional functions. No longer are they limited to silent reading spaces or shelves of dusty tomes. Instead, they have emerged as vibrant, multifaceted environments that actively contribute to the development of students and the enrichment of the entire educational community.

At the heart of this renaissance is the transformation of school librarians themselves. These dedicated professionals have transcended their roles as mere bookkeepers and evolved into educators in their own right. They now actively engage with students and teachers alike, harnessing their expertise to create a dynamic, collaborative atmosphere within the library. They have become adept at curating resources, selecting materials that align with curricular needs and spark students' intellectual curiosity.

One of the central facets of the 21st Century Renaissance of school libraries is their newfound role as champions of information literacy. In an era where misinformation abounds, school librarians are pivotal in teaching students how to sift through the digital noise, critically evaluate sources, and synthesize information. They empower students with the skills necessary to conduct effective research, equipping them with the tools needed to excel not just in their academic pursuits but also in life beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, school libraries have emerged as hubs of creativity, fostering a culture of innovation and imagination. They provide students with access to a wide array of resources, including digital technology, creative spaces, and maker spaces. These environments encourage experimentation and hands-on learning, promoting skills that are invaluable in the 21st century job market.

In addition to these roles, school libraries serve as hubs for collaborative learning. They facilitate group projects, discussions, and workshops that encourage students to work together, problem-solve, and think critically. This collaborative atmosphere not only enhances academic achievement but also nurtures important life skills, such as effective communication and teamwork.

Perhaps the most enduring impact of this renaissance is the cultivation of a lifelong love for learning. School libraries, through their transformation, have instilled in students a thirst for knowledge that extends far beyond the classroom. By providing a wealth of resources, engaging programming, and a supportive learning environment, they have sowed the seeds of intellectual curiosity that will continue to flourish throughout students' lives.

The 21st Century Renaissance of school libraries is a testament to the adaptability and innovation within the education sector. These libraries have transcended their traditional roles to become dynamic centres of learning, inspiring students, educators, and the entire school community to embrace lifelong learning, critical thinking, and creative exploration. In doing so, they play an integral part in preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

7. Representation of School Librarian, Associations and Advocacy

School librarians play a vital role in nurturing a love for reading, fostering information literacy, and supporting the educational journey of students. Their importance is recognized worldwide, and various countries have established school library associations to provide training, development, and advocacy for these dedicated professionals. However, in the case of India, the journey towards recognizing and supporting school librarians has been relatively recent. In 2018, the School Library Association-India (SLA) was registered, marking a significant step towards enhancing the role of school librarians in the country.

8. Global Representation

Around the world, school librarians are represented and supported through school library associations that serve as networks for these professionals. These organizations work tirelessly to enhance the status of school librarians, provide training, and promote the value of school libraries within the education system. Some of the well-established associations include the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) in the United States, the School Library Association (SLA) in the United Kingdom, and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA).

These associations offer a wide range of resources and training programs, including conferences, webinars, publications, and professional development opportunities for school librarians. The aim is to equip school librarians with the knowledge and skills needed to create dynamic, information-rich learning environments that support students' academic success and personal growth.

9. Indian School Library Association: A Promising Beginning

In contrast to the long-standing traditions of school library associations in many countries, India saw the establishment of the School Library Association-India (SLA) in 2018. The founding of ISLA was a momentous occasion, as it marked a significant step towards recognizing the importance of school librarians in the Indian education system.

SLA aims to serve as a platform for school librarians across India, fostering a sense of community and collaboration among professionals in the field. The association seeks to provide resources, support, and training opportunities that will enable school librarians to excel in their roles, thereby enhancing the educational experience of students.

10. Challenges and the Way Forward

While the establishment of SLA is a positive development for school librarians in India, there is still a long road ahead. The challenges faced by school librarians in India include limited resources, varying levels of recognition within different educational institutions, and the need for increased advocacy for the profession's significance.

To address these challenges, SLA, in collaboration with its international counterparts, can work towards sharing best practices, advocating for the integration of school libraries into the curriculum, and highlighting the vital role that school librarians play in promoting literacy and lifelong learning. By actively engaging with educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, SLA can continue to make strides in raising awareness and fostering a strong sense of community among school librarians in India.

The global network of school librarians, represented by school library associations, plays a pivotal role in enhancing the profession and advocating for its importance in the education system. While school librarians in many countries benefit from well-established associations, India's School Library Association is a promising addition to this global community. As SLA continues to grow and evolve, it will contribute to the development and recognition of school librarians in India, ensuring that they can provide students with the best possible learning experiences. With dedication, collaboration, and a clear vision, school librarians and their associations worldwide can continue to chart a course towards a brighter future for education.

11. Conclusion

11.1. India: Challenges and the path ahead

While the journey of school librarianship in India has been marked by progress, several challenges persist. Inadequate funding, limited resources, and the need for ongoing professional development pose hurdles to the growth of school libraries. Moreover, the absence of specialized formal training for school librarians is a notable obstacle. Aspiring librarians often have to navigate their roles without dedicated guidance, making it crucial for them to seek self-directed learning and adapt to changing demands. Additionally, the lack of standardized guidelines for school library management and curriculum integration adds complexity to the role. School librarians must collaborate with teachers to align library resources with classroom learning objectives, highlighting the need for targeted training to bridge this gap.

The challenges faced by school librarianship in India are manifold, and as educators and keepers of knowledge, addressing these issues is critical for the continued growth and effectiveness of school libraries. Let's delve deeper into these challenges and explore potential paths ahead:

1. **Inadequate Funding:** School libraries often struggle with limited budgets, which can hinder their ability to acquire new books, technology, and resources. To address this, it is essential for school administrators, government bodies, and educational stakeholders to recognize the value of well-funded libraries. Advocacy and lobbying for increased funding can be a part of the solution, as can exploring alternative sources of financial support, such as grants, donations, and partnerships with local businesses or organizations.
2. **Limited Resources:** Many school libraries face the challenge of outdated or insufficient resources. To combat this, librarians can actively seek out donated materials, collaborate with publishers and distributors for discounts, and create a culture of resource sharing among schools. Additionally, the adoption of digital resources and e-books can help overcome physical resource limitations.
3. **Professional Development:** The field of school librarianship is ever-evolving, and continuous professional development is essential. To overcome this challenge, librarians can take advantage of online courses, workshops, and conferences to enhance their skills and stay updated on emerging trends and technologies. School administrations can support their librarians by providing time and resources for professional development.
4. **Lack of Formal Training:** The absence of specialized formal training for school librarians is a significant challenge. Educational institutions and library associations can work together to develop accredited programs and certifications in school librarianship. This would ensure that aspiring librarians receive proper training and are better prepared for their roles.
5. **Standardized Guidelines:** The absence of standardized guidelines for school library management and curriculum integration can be addressed by creating national or regional standards for school libraries. These standards should be developed with input from educators, librarians, and curriculum specialists, ensuring that the role of the library is integrated into the broader educational framework.
6. **Collaboration with Teachers:** To foster better collaboration between school librarians and teachers, professional development programs can focus on pedagogical strategies and curriculum alignment. School librarians can also proactively engage with teachers, attend faculty meetings, and contribute to the development of lesson plans that make effective use of library resources.
7. **Self-Directed Learning:** Aspiring and practicing school librarians should embrace self-directed learning as a means to adapt to changing demands. This can involve reading professional literature, participating in

online forums, and networking with colleagues to share best practices and innovative ideas.

While the challenges in school librarianship in India are significant, they are not insurmountable. With a concerted effort from librarians, educators, administrators, and policymakers, it is possible to navigate these obstacles and create a more robust and effective school library system. The path ahead involves advocacy, investment, collaboration, and a commitment to professional development to ensure that school libraries continue to play a vital role in education and learning.

In conclusion, the development of education and the shifting requirements of society are both reflected in the intriguing history of school librarianship in India. School librarianship in India has seen a remarkable shift from its beginnings in colonial times to its current position in the digital age. It serves as evidence of the libraries' continuing significance and the committed professionals who have guided their growth, ultimately enhancing the educational environment of the country.

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None.

13. Conflict of Interest

None.

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