

Women librarian empowerment in the digital Era

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Abstract

The Libraries of tomorrow will be information centers of a new type relying on information technology for almost every aspect of library activities. The skills needed to handle the future library services will be different from what they are at present. In this new world of information technology the woman librarians of tomorrow will also have to be equally skilled to have the status which they deserve. The advancement of the Digital Technology helps effective participation of women in the decision-making and implementation process related to science and technology including planning and setting priorities for research and development and the choice, acquisition, adoption, innovation and application of science and technology for the development.

Introduction

On the threshold of a new millennium, librarians are getting involved in new activities in the computerization of libraries, combining in a balanced manner the execution of traditional activities with those which guarantee transition to the new model of an electronic library. Rapid advances in information processing, storage and communication technologies have revolutionized the role of worldwide libraries in disseminating information services to their users. As a result, libraries are facing new challenges; new competitions, new demands, new expectations and a variety of information services from users tailored to their wants and needs.

The dawn of new millennium, also started the introduction of other concepts in the library and information field's activities which, although they did exist, were not part of the vocabulary conventional librarians 'for example, information management, strategic planning, management by objectives, marketing, mission, vision and others. When facing this new wave of terms it became essential to prepare women librarians in new conditions imposed by globalization. Various courses were started on strategic planning of information services, marketing, accounting, new technologies, and guidelines for information policies was initiated across various universities in India. This new culture was slowly incorporated into the library's problems and drawing up a legal document, which is being revised and outlines strategies needed to carry out the plan in new conditions.

Librarianship as a profession for women

Librarianship as profession in India was for the scholar librarians till the early part of the 20th century, mostly men of letters only were custodians of libraries and the written cultural heritage. However, the first woman credited with occupying any key- post in India was Ms. Anandibai Prabhudesai who was the superintendent at the children's library in Baroda in the 1930s.

The social stereotype is clearly reflected in the division of professions which need specific training and higher education. Academia, Scientific profession, research, Law etc are male oriented and male dominated professions whereas teaching, social work and later librarianship have been considered as service professions which are suitable for women. It has always been mentioned in both the developed and the developing countries that women by nature and upbringing can support the service professions better.

Through various surveys it has been seen that in more developed countries women still accounted for more than 80% of the library profession. But in most countries there is a dual career structure for men and women. In the Indian context the situation is slightly different. Women were admitted in the professional area mainly during the first half of 20th century. In 1940 the first group of students were admitted to a raining course conducted by the Bengal Library Association, Calcutta and in 1942 the first qualified female librarian took a job at the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Till 1975 the number of women in the field of librarianship in India was not very significant. Though it was felt that this profession would be very right for women in India because nature has bestowed women with qualities of patience. Sympathy and perseverance, the enrolment statistics now available show that librarianship is still not a female intensive profession in India. The average ratio of male female enrolment in the Bachelor of Library and Information Science and Master of Library and Information Science in 3:2, 3:1 respectively. Teaching remained the main occupation for women in India till the early 1970s.

Women opted to take up librarianship as a career often due to the following reasons

1. Women who wanted employment but were not particularly prepared to teach, considered librarianship a good alternative, because the environment would be academic whereas the work will not have the requirement of teaching on regular basis.

2. Security of women is a major factor in an Indian family. Indian society being totally compartmentalized between the sexes which is reflected in the upbringing of boys and girls, the work place which ensures security has a very important role in women's employments.
3. The qualities expected in an Indian women is suited to the activates in a library.
4. Librarianship generally does not demand mobility in service, and women in India are not expected to be mobile outside the family structure.

Status and hierarchical position of women LIS Professionals in India

The Indian Library system can be divided into five major areas of work.

1. National Library System.
2. Academic Library System.
3. Special Library System.
4. Public Library System.
5. Informatics.

Within these systems of librarianship, women now work in various capacities and positions. However, the age old stereotype of regarding women's role as teachers, and child bearers and rearers is reflected in the staff structure of these systems also. Within these systems there is a major difference between the types of libraries that absorb the maximum number of women. Very much like the western world the children's libraries, school libraries and to a certain extent college libraries employ women as librarians in larger numbers in contrast to the scientific and specialized library system. Women are also in demand in girls' schools and women's colleges which are in significant numbers in India. But within the hierarchy of the library system the prevalence of women in these types of libraries does not make them eligible to occupy the top positions in major libraries. In the government library sector the maximum number of women are seen in a cadre which is above the paraprofessionals but below the decision making level.

Since most women especially those who are married cannot attend training programmes organized outside the city of work, the women lag behind their men colleagues. Therefore, when promotions are considered by seniority cum fitness, then the assessment reports do not reflect any additional qualification or achievement. This becomes a deterrent in the case of women.

The percentage of women librarians in different categories in the three large libraries under the Government of India such as the National Library, Central Secretariat Library and the Delhi Public Library clearly shows that most women hold posts up to the sectional head only. The topmost positions are still held by males in general.

Women librarian in digital Era

The Digital age is a period in human history characterized by the shift from traditional industry that the industrial revolution brought through industrialization, to an economy based on information computerization. The onset of the information. Age is associated with the Digital Revolution, just as the industrial Revolution marked the onset of the Industrial Age. The Information Age formed by capitalizing on computer microminiaturization advances. This evolution of technology is daily life, as well as of educational life style, has allowed rapid global communications and networking to shape modern society.

Skills required for women librarians in the digital Era

The advancement of the Digital Technology helps effective participation of women in the decision-making and implementation process related to science and technology including planning and setting priorities for research and development and the choice, acquisition, adoption, innovation and application of science and technology for the development.

In the recent past, knowledge and its technological applications have grown at an ever increasing speed, worldwide, services, manufacturing, etc. This is most apparent in electronics, communications, information and services. Managing Information technology involves professional skill and approach to deal with the global dynamic interactive international environment.

Information Technology is India's tomorrow, as pointed out by our former Prime Minister Sri A B Vajpayee Information Technology has emerged as the center of attraction and attention of not only the industry but also the political leadership, business and above all the youth of this country who are launching into their professional careers.

Major advancement in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been among the most exciting and far-reaching developments in science and technology in the late twentieth century.

Personal computers, the internet, Video Games, Cellular phones, electronic banking and satellite television are just a few of the ICT innovation and diffusion will be maintained well into the twenty-first century as computing, telecommunications and broadcast and print media continue to coverage on common digital-based techniques.

The technical revolution has also generated many visions which have been focused on concepts like the information society, information superhighway, virtual organizations and post-Fordist industrial processes. These vision have driven government policies the opening of new product and services markets and the development of new of living working and doing business.

The information revolution offers both opportunities and challenges to women. Today information society is passing through various news challenges and opportunities such as; information professional skills, information management skills and up to date subjects knowledge.

- Analyzed the users need form time to time.
- Watch on the information flow within the enterprise.
- Make the appropriate use of information in a suitable situation.
- Be aware of the consequences of the misuse of the information etc.

In the present information age, appropriate techniques for storing, manipulating, Disseminating and desired information for the right user at the right time in the right form. Computer and internet are changing our society form an information society to a global society.

- Efficiency in operational performance,
- Promotion of competitive market,
- Involving users in product designing and operation, and
- Decision-making.

Empowerment of Women

The concept of Empowerment has become one of the widely used development terms.

Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process, which enables women to realize their full potential and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted, nor can it be given away as alms. Power has to be acquired and once acquired it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved, in short, empowerment is a process of challenging exercised, sustained and preserved in short, empowerment is a process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power and empowerment is attained through awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision-mailing process, control and transformative-action.

Women's Empowerment as a concept, introduced at the International Women's Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, defines. It as – Redistribution of social power and Control of resources in favour of Women Empowerment can be achieved only by thrusting a quantitative and qualitative change, particularly in the field of Education, Health and Employment.

An Empowered women would be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive self-esteem, able to face any difficult situation and to participate. In developmental activities and in the process of decision-making Empowerment literally means- becoming powerful. The Dictionary of Social Work defines empowerment as the theory concerned with how people may gain effective control over their lives so as to achieve their interests as a group. The dictionary

definition links Empowerment with networking. Empowerment can refer to user participation in services and to the collective movement generally in which groups take action on their own behalf either in co-operation with or independently. All the National and International conventions on women insist on Networking and group cohesion as important strategies for women's empowerment.

The empowerment strategy in the Beijing conference report states, - if women are to be empowered, it is necessary to provide an expending networking of support services so that they are freed form some of their gender related shackles.

The Programme of Action (POA 1992) of the National Policy on Education (NPE 1986) states that women become empowered through collective reflection and decision –making

The parameters of empowerment

- Building a positive self image and self-confidence
- Developing the ability to think critically
- Building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action
- Ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change
- Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society
- Providing the where withal for economic independence.

Women present half the resources and half the potential in all the societies. It has been clear for decades that women in many parts of the world make key contributions in areas of development such as agriculture, health, education and water resources management. Hence improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. Many organization are working for the development of women in all parts of the world. If such organizations establish networks among themselves they will be mutually benefited. But the elements such as trust, coordination and cooperation are essential for strengthening such social networks

Global Information Internship Program (GIIP) in United States is providing support to civil society group by promoting their access to information technology resources. The women's empowerment working group in the GIIP strives to empower women by providing IT development services to other Women's Empowerment organizations. Their work strengthens the networks between women across the globe. They are committed to improving access to health services, economic empowerment, social equality, autonomy and violence against women of all kinds, land rights and political representation through informational technology, they offer experienced in terms in web development, content

research, software skills, computer hardware installation and networking.

The amount of information transacted in electronic form is steadily increasing and in future, a substantial part of information will be received only in electronic form. Librarianship is going to have much wider sphere of operation than what it is today. Publishers and Information providers are increasingly targeting their services directly to individual customers and not through intermediaries.

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