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Retrospective Conversion of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library: Issues and Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Modern tool like computer has replaced traditional methods of storing and retrieving knowledge. Retrospective conversion of manual bibliographical records on online mode is considered to be the first step in the direction of computerisation process in the library. This paper attempts to analyse the retrospective conversion process undertaken by the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi, a premier social science research library in India.

Keywords: NMML, retrospective conversion, knowledge retrieval, knowledge epistemology, classification systems, knowledge storage, knowledge society.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Knowledge Organisation (KO) is very old. It can be traced back to ancient Greece, when Plato and his disciple Aristotle made efforts to organise all available knowledge of that time. Aristotle is known as the father of encyclopaedia as he put together his entire treatise at one place. There has been a sea change in the tools and techniques of organising knowledge since the days of ancient Greece.

KO is core to all library and information related work. There is no any single definition which is universally accepted, precise and useful to the library and information science profession community. Satija[1] has defined knowledge organisation as "conglomeration of activities to sort and order knowledge to acquire, utilise, evaluate, represent and communicate knowledge for problem solving". Going by this crisp and carefully worded definition one can suggest that the sphere of KO encompasses a wide array of concepts, like knowledge epistemology, classification systems, subject analysis, use of classification in online systems and on the web, automatic classification including subject cataloguing, subject headings, descriptive cataloguing, OPAC, etc. KO tools and techniques basically provide control to the user as well as the librarian/information scientist to run and use the information storage and retrieval system efficiently.

As an old saying goes, "Library is a store house of knowledge". But it has no meaning unless desired documents/information can be disseminated to the users through an efficient storage and retrieval system. This requires that library and information science professionals must possess sound knowledge of the tools and systems of KO.

One of the main features of the information society, which is now inching towards knowledge-based society, is the collection, storage, repackaging, transmission and dissemination of knowledge. Libraries, which are catering to the research needs of academics and researchers, are facing tremendous challenges.

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Information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the past decade have transformed the nature of library and information services. The concept of knowledge society has further bearing on these services. For equitable disbursement and utilisation of knowledge, the library and information services have to keep pace with the technological changes and innovations as well as the knowledge component. In the developing countries, the challenge appears to be more acute as libraries, as the first step, have to go for retrospective conversion of the manually prepared bibliographic records to the machine-readable ones.

2. EVOLUTION OF RETROSPECTIVE CONVERSION PROCESS: INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL SCENARIO

Retrospective conversion means conversion of manually prepared or printed catalogue records of a library into a machine-readable form. According to Bryant Philip[2]: "retrospective conversion is one such area where once money has been invested, a permanent benefit is assured." Though the process is expensive, laborious and time-consuming, but all these can be justified in relation to the benefits it generates for the researchers community.

During the 1980s, retrospective conversion generated considerable interest at the international level. Henriette Avram of Library of Congress argued that "complete conversion of our retrospective catalogues has become not so much as ideal as a necessity". Philip Bryant considered it a topic of vital importance to the national and international library community. David Stoker[3] observed that "retrospective catalogue conversion is a one-off cost which will ultimately result in savings in staff's time and efforts in the libraries concerned and will also convey tangible benefits to the library community as a whole." During 1995-96, Philip Bryant, with a group of specialists, conducted two studies: first on higher education sector and second on other types of libraries in Britain. They basically studied the logistical and financial issues involving the retrospective cataloguing programme. In the higher education sector, British academic libraries had 28 million under-catalogued items awaiting retrospective conversion. The study on other types of libraries, financed by British Library Research and Innovations Centre, estimated that public library authorities had about 12 million records for retrospective conversion. The report of these studies addressed the complexity of the task and recommended the need for having a coordinated national programme to complete the task of retrospective conversion.

One must mention here the emergence of retrospective conversion services rendered by Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) during this period. OCLC made retrospective conversion easy and quick. Further, it provided conversion services with OCLC MARC records. This helped many libraries to convert their manual bibliographical records into machine-readable format. OCLC has greatly facilitated searching of the entire collection, and improvement in the circulation of all types of records, thereby making possible for the users to find hidden sources in their respective libraries.

In the Indian context, libraries have started gearing themselves to retrospective conversion to give the boost to more and more resource sharing among libraries, though in laggardly manner the challenges put forward by information and communication technologies, networking, electronic information, etc. In India there are more than 65,000 libraries (all types). Out of these, an overwhelming 97 per cent are traditional libraries, not even 3 per cent are automated; there are only 300 electronic libraries. So inspite of all the hype, India is still very slow in embrcing the benefits of modernisation. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has initiated efforts in this direction through its INFLIBNET Project. This project has made the beginning of computerisation of academic libraries in India. The focus is to access information from anywhere and boost the concept of resource sharing among libraries. Under this Programme 142 university libraries[4] have already been computerised so far.

3. NMML: APROFILE

The NMML, popularly known as Teen Murti Library has three divisions: a memorial museum, a library on modern India, and a centre for contemporary studies.

The library with its rich resources on modern Indian history and contemporary India has occupied a distinct position in the academic world of scholars in social sciences. Besides in English language, the library has a collection of books in some forty odd foreign languages. Except National Library, Kolkata, perhaps no other library in India possesses books on so many languages. The collection of this library also includes some of the very rare books like, "Charyapada", the first book written in Bengali language in 10th or 12th century A.D (the library has photocopy of this book). The NMML also has in its collection the lectures delivered by Swami Vivekananda in the World's Parliament of Religions held at Chicago

during 1893. Eminent social science researchers from India and abroad frequent this institution. A study conducted by Kanungo[5] reveals that the NMML is the top ranked library which is frequently used by the social scientists. It is also ranked first with regard to its collection in the area of social sciences. Its holdings include documentary and non-documentary sources as shown in Table 1.

Table1. NMML holdings

Sources	Number
Books	2,32,521
Maps	914
Periodicals	497
Periodicals Bound	30,000 approx.
Private and Institutional Papers	1000
Oral History Transcripts	More than 1000
Photographs	1,11,000
CD-ROMs	114
Microfilms	18,000
Microfiche	51,000
Thesis on Microfilm	1287

The NMML has computerised bibliographical records of its holdings (books, manuscripts and maps) by outsourcing the job to two agencies, which started the job in September 2003 and took three years to complete the assignment in December 2006. The total number of documents converted retrospective are 1,83,000 approximately. The same number of documents have been reclassified, recatalogued and assigned subject headings. Besides retrospective conversion, the agencies also put barcode labels on the books and did the processing and shelving work. The library has been continuously creating computerised bibliographical records of books since October 2003 and so far 2,43,521 bibliographical records of books have been put in machine readable format[6].

4. METHODOLOGY

The retrospective conversion was undertaken subject-wise. Subject headings to the books were assigned according to Library of Congress Subject Heading (LCSH) 26th edition. Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) 21st edition was used for classification and AACR-II for cataloguing. The agencies, in consultation with the NMML staff developed a suitable format for inputting the data in UNIMARC version 3 format. The data input sheets prepared by the project staff was checked by the supervisors for correctness of data with regard to cataloguing, classification, subject heading and UNIMARC format. Then these sheets were randomly checked by the NMML staff members. The agencies then rectified the errors and omissions detected during checking. The NMML uses LibSys version 4 on Windows 98 operating system. The processed data was downloaded into LibSys Version 4 (UNIMARC version 3 format) on Windows 98 through ISO 2709 exchange format. The NMML decided September 2003 as cut off period; books acquired before this period were taken for retrospective conversion by the library staff. The work on retrospective conversion was started simultaneously by the outsourcing agencies as well as by the NMML staff. This decision helped in the smooth running of the library without having backlog work for the staff. The library staff was also given training and orientation to carry forward this job.

5. LIBRARY STAFF'S PERSPECTIVE

The NMML was using Colon Classification (6th edition) for classification and Classified Catalogue Code (5th edition) for cataloguing of documents. These two indigenous schemes were used uninterruptedly since the inception of NMML. With the emergence of new disciplines and multidisciplinary nature of the documents the library staff was compelled to use local variation for assigning class numbers quite often. Hence, it felt the need for retrospective conversion of library catalogue records, reclassification and recataloguing of library holdings in order to keep pace with the changing time. However, for more than three decades, the library had been using the Colon Classification (CC) and the Classified Catalogue Code (CCC) for classifying and cataloguing its holdings; hence the switch over to DDC 21st edition and AACR-II was not an easy option initially.

5.1 Reclassification of Documents

Initially, the NMML staff faced difficulty in assigning class numbers to books according to the DDC scheme. They found it hard to find specific class numbers for books relating to Indian themes, especially in the case of government documents, like gazetteers, etc. So, very often they were forced to assign only broad class numbers. It clearly indicates the inherent limitation in the DDC with regard to the Indian themes. To illustrate this point, it so happened that the books classified according to the CC under the main class 'History' have gone to class 'Political Science' in the DDC. While the classes 'History' (V) and 'Political Science' (W) were arranged in close proximity in the CC, these subjects are placed

far from each other (900 and 320 respectively) in the DDC.

In a research library broad class numbers do not help much in the fruitful organisation of documents. The staff was of the view that the DDC numbers alone cannot be assigned to maintain specificity of the collection, and hence, they mix both the schemes; this has resulted in strange class numbers. For example, documents on Indian political parties, works on Indira Gandhi (Indirana), Nehru (Nehruana), and Gandhi (Gandhiana) and biographies are given class numbers which are a mix of DDC 21st edition and CC 6th edition and book numbers are solely assigned according to CC 6th edition. Some of the examples from the library catalogue illustrate this very explicitly.

I) Biography

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad: A Biographical Memoir by Mahadev Desai

DDC 21st Ed. Call Number		CC 6th Ed.Call Number	
923.254M88A	HI	w2,M88A	H1

II) Generalia

Gandhiana

O8G	zG

Nehruana

O8N	zN

Indirana

O8I	zI

III) Political Parties

The Congress Splits by Basant Chatterjee

324.254M85	L01	V2,4M85'N69	L01

Government publications and private collections segregated from other collections by the use of alphabetical device. For example, class numbers of all the government publications prefixed by capital 'G' alphabet and class numbers of all the private collections are prefixed by the first capital letter of the person's name to whom the collection belongs.

This raises an important question that under which rules the library has made such deviation in the scheme. This reminds what Melvil Dewey wrote to Ranganathan in 1932: "You say you write in your book that the DC has been mangled by the ... Let me know the addresses of the libraries. I am going to sue them in a court of law"[7]. During the Indian Library Conference (1944) when some of the friends of Ranganathan devised a schedule for some of the Indian classics for the DC scheme and wanted to adopt it, at that time Ranganathan cautioned : "You don't know what you are in for! If you, although Melvil Dewey is no longer living, you don't know what kind of legal successors he has left and if you begin to mangle it again with your own numbers, you may have to face a court of law". Further Ranganathan expressed that Dewey wanted to collaborate with him by putting Indian classics, literature and culture schedules in the DC to curtail the American bias. But this could not happen due to Dewey's death.

Most importantly, in the international horizon the sharing of information is adhered to on the basis of some norms and standards; non-adherence will adversely affect resource sharing. In order to get effective and powerful organisation of large amounts of documents and information in all possible forms, the library and information specialists need to synthesize traditional library concepts and computerise knowledge storage and retrieval tools such as computer -based indexing and storage and retrieval. However, whatever classification and cataloguing standards one chooses, it should be followed in totality.

5.2 Recataloguing of Documents

The library also recatalogued books according to the AACR II (earlier library was following CCC 5th Ed.). The staff gradually learnt the rules, but initially lack of knowledge of the AACR II rules and proper training to use the code were the bottlenecks. Library staff was also not acquainted with assigning subject headings using LCSH list to the documents but they gradually overcome the problem.

5.3 Ranganathan's Fourth Law of Library Science and Retrospective Conversion Process

Retrospective conversion of bibliographical records into machine-readable form fulfils the objective of Ranganathan's fourth law of library science, i.e. Save the time of the reader. Online catalogue will speed up the reader's search for required information. It not only helps users find information quickly but also ensures that the data should be structured in the online mode in such a way that it can be retrieved by the users easily. Retrospective conversion

process has definitely saved the time of the reader by creating a user-friendly and useful online catalogue of library records. The other laws of library science devised by Ranganathan also go in consonance with the retrospective conversion process. Ranganathan[8] categorically stated: "The computer in library activities is one of the versatile forms in which electronics can help mankind. We must accept the computers. We must derive all the benefits it is capable of giving to us. It can relive us of much of repetitive routine work; and thus, it can release man to high kinds of work with creative element". Gnoli[9] observes that "computers exist to manage and process labelled data, so they are the perfect ally of knowledge organisation systems."

Though library staff of the NMML agreed that computerised access to library holdings has given the users easy and prompt access to required information, they were of the view that Indian tools for knowledge organisation are still better to organise Indian themes and can be used in the era of networked society.

6. USER'S PERSPECTIVE

The NMML has made online the bibliographical details of its holdings comprising books and maps in the first phase of computerisation. In the second phase, the library is planning to make online bibliographical records of other holdings which include periodicals, photographs, private and institutional papers, oral history transcripts, microfilms, microfiches, theses on microfilms and CD-ROMs. The users of this library are getting used to searching books on the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). A random survey of the OPAC users of the NMML revealed satisfactory findings. A structured questionnaire was given to 21 regular users of the library; 81 per cent of the respondents belonged to the university faculties and 19 per cent were the NMML research fellows. And 81 per cent of the users were using the library for more than five years and the 19 per cent using it for more than one year. All the respondents were aware that the library has shifted to the online catalogue from the traditional card catalogue. While 67 per cent felt the need for assistance by the library staff in while using the OPAC, 33 per cent did not needed any assistance. Eighty-six per cent of the users have not received any training in using the OPAC and were interested in getting the same to use it effectively in their research. Forty-three per cent (43%) of the users also expressed that they made use of the card catalogue along with the OPAC. The reason was that they were not able to search or were not getting full details of the required book in OPAC.

Respondents were asked about the preference on their approach to OPAC. The first preference was given to author followed by title, subject and class number (Table 2). The users are less interested in class numbers because they may not be familiar with the classification scheme, author and title approaches received the first and second ranks respectively. This indicates that the users were serious researchers and were well-versed with the literature published in their field. Subject approach was not much used by the target group perhaps because of their less familiarity with the subject headings. One must keep in mind that the NMML is a research library and its clientele is highly knowledgeable researchers.

The users compared the traditional card catalogue with computerised catalogue and all the respondents said that in comparison to card catalogue computerised catalogue is less time consuming. Seventy-six per cent felt that it (OPAC) is easy to operate, 71 per cent found it more systematic, for 67 per cent of the respondents it provided better subject approach in comparison to card catalogue and 62 per cent found it more user-friendly (Table 3).

7. CONCLUSION

The merger of traditional tools with modern technologies has made the beginning where libraries are no longer considered being the dark rooms filled with book shelves. Collaborative efforts of library professionals, management personnel, and ICT experts have converted traditional libraries into electronic libraries to digital and virtual libraries. In order to

Table 2. Approaches of the users to browse OPAC

Approaches of the Users to Browse OPAC	Weighted Index (WI*)	Rank
By Name of the Author	4.90	1
By Title of the Book	3.66	2
By Subject of the Book	2.95	3
By Class Number of the Book	1.09	4

Table 3. Comparison of card catalogue with OPAC by users

Comparison between Card Catalogue and OPAC	Percentage	Rank
OPAC is less time consuming	100%	1
OPAC is easy to operate	76%	2
OPAC is more systematic	71%	3
OPAC provides better subject approach	67%	4
OPAC is more user friendly	62%	5
OPAC makes it easy to locate books on the shelves	48%	6

meet the challenges set by the ever changing technology-oriented environment the research libraries must adhere to changes. This will help in rendering efficient and specialised library services to its patrons facilitating resource sharing. For this, the librarians have to use the latest technology and upgrade their professional skills by undergoing technology-oriented training periodically. Concepts, like metadata, Internet cataloguing, knowledge management, knowledge organisation, Z39.50, digital library, virtual library have become very common in the profession. Library professionals should not only understand these concepts but also take steps to implement them. Libraries in India are far behind due to paucity of resources, lack of knowledge or skilled labour, but surely a beginning has been made and much has to be accomplished. In India, millions of records are available in the varied traditional forms; if they became accessible online to the users community they will definitely prove to be of immense value for research.

Retrospective conversion process of the NMML is a right step in this direction. However, the National Library of India, which is one of the depository libraries, should take the lead by converting all bibliographical records of its holdings into machine-readable ones. The database created of all these records should be made accessible to all types of libraries in India to match and download the records. This can reduce the time, money and man hours spent individually by the libraries in going for online catalogues in India.

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