

Traditional libraries and librarians

Balaram¹ has lovingly described his experience with the IISc library in the mid-1970s. His description summarizes well the experience of many of us who frequented the library during those same years. Balaram asks: 'Will the traditional libraries eventually become extinct? What will the "librarians" of the future do?' I wish to make a few comments in regard to these two unanswered questions.

If we step back a bit and look beyond the stacks of books and journals that traditional libraries have accumulated (but are attempting to jettison for lack of space these days), and articulate to ourselves that the primary functions of the libraries are to provide support for learning and research, and to stimulate thinking and creativity, it is natural to inquire about the essentials of those functions in this new world of digital technology.

They are now more in the form of assisting users with online discovery and cataloging, sharing access to e-publications and e-content, providing rapid response to questions that arise in these contexts, giving assistance on distance learning and long-distance meetings (for example, by maintaining a proper studio with appropriate technology), providing an environment where quiet study as well as group discussions are possible (the latter by maintaining, for example, small rooms meant for just that purpose), etc. In particular, the IISc library could display the great works that were published by its professors and students to provide inspiration to its young faculty and students alike; it could also provide a tasteful display of the historically important artifacts and documents of the institute. I am sure that readers of this journal can

think of other interesting possibilities but the main point remains that, although the answers to the questions raised above will vary with time, a library should always provide the synergy and environment that nourishes and encourages innovative learning. Librarians should be effective enablers of this mission. With this understanding, libraries can avoid becoming irrelevant and artificial.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2010, **98**, 879.

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Research journals

I read with interest the editorial¹ titled 'Libraries, journals and publishers'. The last paragraph is foretelling. I am tempted to share my thoughts, being a scientist at the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), which is both an institute and a publisher.

NISCAIR publishes 17 primary research journals and two abstracting journals, apart from other publications. In addition to hard copies, the journals are available free online.

NISCAIR however is an institute which is not into 'hard' or 'wet' research. It provides scientific information, through its library, library methods and techniques and publishing to the scientific community and is into information research. Due to electronic facilitation worldwide what probably has arisen is an opportunity for every laboratory, institute, department which usually has a library, to have a mini NISCAIR in their

set-up. Each of these outfits can publish the institute newsletter, annual report, a few primary and secondary journals, instead of its scientists sending their papers to some society publication or a commercial publication, which sometimes charge a publication fee. Probably such set-ups will lack the 'punch' of societies or commercial publishers but 'reach' will not suffer; because any Google search will 'float' those publications. Authenticity will also not suffer, if in addition to management council, research council, which such laboratories, institutes, departments usually have, a research publication council is constituted by the respective laboratory, institute or department. This arrangement is likely to weaken the muscle power of the commercial publishers. Any laboratory, institute, department, depending upon its volume of output can decide upon the frequency of its publications.

This may lead to a third kind of publication, viz. publications at source of research, peer reviewed by the research publication council, in addition to prevalent society publications and commercial publications. With publication tools now available, and more that are likely to come, much of the publication difficulties may be taken care of. If needed, such publication work can be outsourced.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2010, **98**, 879–880.

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