

Librarians and Information professional activities in Nepal during COVID - 19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This article deals with librarians and information professionals including retired librarians, working librarians and all in the field of libraries during the COVID- 19 pandemic 2020 along with the brief history on professional librarians' development in Nepal. It also highlights the adopted online platform of a series of webinars dealing with current important and useful information relevant to library and information science organized by Tribhuvan University, Central Department of Library and Information Science (CDLIS). Further, the article provides a picture of the sudden changes brought by the unexpected outbreak of COVID - 19 pandemic in the library management, services and organization.

Keywords: Professional librarians; COVID-19; TU CDLIS; IFLA Library Map of the world; Webinars; Nepal Library Association; DDC numbers; Nepal.

History of professional librarians and establishment of TU Department of LIS in Nepal

The professional librarians' service and their activities have been operating in Nepal since 1977 onwards. In 1976, on the request of the late Mrs. Shanti Mishra, T.U. sent permanent staff of Tribhuvan University to obtain a Bachelor in Library Science (B.Lib.Sc.) with one year duration in various universities of India. Mrs. Mishra was the Chief Librarian of Tribhuvan University Central Library (TUCL) at that time. She was the first professional librarian in Nepal to receive a Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS) from the USA. She had tried to modernize TUCL by bringing changes in the existing administration, management, and organization to provide better library service and to make it as a model library in the country. She adopted for the first time the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme in Nepal for classifying the books in the library. Now, except medical college libraries, all libraries in Nepal are using this scheme. The credit for this directly goes to Mrs. Mishra for

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her continuous effort and contribution. Mrs. Mishra wanted to train those staff of TU who had returned from India obtaining this B. Lib.Sc. for two months before sending them in their respective assigned libraries and it was accepted by the TU authorities. Those librarians were appointed in the libraries under TU and also other libraries in Nepal.

Establishment of TU Central Department of Library and Information Science (CDLIS) in 1995

TU, CDLIS was established in 1995 under the faculty of Humanities and Social Science and started teaching Bachelor Degree course in Library Science (B.Lib.Sc.). Since then, the library's information science education has continued in Nepal and librarians do not have to go to India and other countries in order to get this degree. Moreover, the country also produced professional librarians in Nepal. Thus, this was the landmark origin for the professional development in librarianship in Nepal. The TU, CDLIS is also a significant step to foster library professionals in the country. Since 2002, TU, CDLIS began teaching the Master of Library Science course (MLIS) in library and information science and it is still continuing by the TU, CDLIS.

It is matter of great satisfaction that degree holder professional librarians are now working in all libraries. They are managing the libraries with the knowledge, skill and new ICT skill for storage, preservation and retrieval. Very few of them have received degrees in Library and Information Science from abroad also.

Major library activities performed in Nepal during COVID - 19 pandemic

The sudden and unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 to date has had a global impact without any discrimination regarding gender, age, color, economic status, literacy and other geographical boundaries. The impact has been noticed in librarians of Nepal also. Because of this environment they have had to change their policies, management, reader service, collection development, preservation and conservation, etc. Several activities have had to be done sitting away from the readers. Readers have changed too: not willing to visit the libraries due to the shocking spread of this deadly disease. In this situation the devoted professional librarians working in the libraries, retired librarians and professional teachers of the CDLIS conducted their activities through a virtual platform as continuity in their professional work. Four major activities are conducted by those librarians who are described below. Similarly, CDLIS organized a series of webinars on different useful titles, inviting facilitators of relevant subjects.

Activity 1: Expansion of the DDC numbers to accommodate geographical areas of Nepal

The Dewey Decimal classification scheme had included a single notation in Table 2 - 5496 for Nepal since its first publication a hundred years ago and no librarians attempted

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(except by the late librarian P. P. Amatya, Assistant librarian and me in 2005) to include DDC notations for five Regional Developments, 14 zones and 75 districts by expanding the present notation for Nepal notation 954.96 according to the administrative division of that time. In 2005, we did not receive any reply and remained pending till now.

In the second attempt we were successful in expanding the Nepal notation 954.96 through the continuous effort of OCLC editor Alex Kyrios, according to the new political system of Nepal, introduced in 2015.

Process adopted for the update of Table 2

In August 2018, we Nepalese librarians got an opportunity to attend the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions World Library and Information congress General Assembly and conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We attended the OCLC International Dewey Users short meeting for one and half hours organized by the Dewey Decimal classification team from the Library of Congress. In that programme, I proposed with the DDC team and OCLC editor, Alex Kyrios, for expansion of DDC notations for Nepal giving the example of India and other countries in which the DDC notations have been already assigned. After the end of the meeting, according to the present situation of Nepal, I requested them to develop DDC notations for Nepal 954.96 including DDC notations for 7 provinces. They were convinced and agreed with my proposal; at that time official names of provinces 3, 4 and 6 had been given. I told them to send the official names of all provinces and I waited for long days for it. Lastly, in September 2020 they sent me an email recalling the meeting of the DDC team at IFLA WLIC 2018 with the outlined proposal to add notations for the provinces with the intention of filling the names of provinces once all chosen and also to share it. After that we organized a webinar through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The participants unanimously agreed that it would be better to present the numerical designation for Nepal with 7 provinces from 1 after Nepal notation 5496 in Table 2 as follows:

T2- 5496	Nepal
T2- 54961	Province No.1
T2- 54962	Province No.2
T2- 54963	Bagmati Pradesh (Bagmati province No. 3)
T2- 54964	Gandaki Pradesh (Gandaki province No. 4)
T2- 54965	Lumbini Pradesh (Lumbini Province No. 5)
T2- 54966	Karnali Pradesh (Karnali province No.6)
T2- 54967	Sudurpaschim Pradesh (Sudurpaschim province No. 7)

We sent the report of the webinar to Alex Kyrios mentioning all details. Alex Kyrios sent this report to the DDC Editorial Committee for approval and they approved it in January

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2021 and made it available in WebDewey for all DDC users of the world, per the approved T2 - Nepal 95496 with 7 Provinces notations in their documents. We achieved our goal after more than hundred years.

Activity 2: Publication of Directory of Nepal Library Association Members - 2021

The former librarian of Tribhuvan University Central Library and president of the Nepal Library Association (NLA) recently published Nepal's Librarian Directory covering all professional librarians and all other librarians in Nepal, the result of hard work of two years by communicating with them. Before the publication he had collected suggestions from the senior professional librarians. It is in two parts: (1) professional librarians and (2) other paraprofessional and others. According to the record, there are more than 200 professional librarians and remaining paraprofessionals totaling 450. The records of the librarians include professionals, technical workforce in LIS field, their qualification, expertise experience and their involvement /affiliation with various sectors, awards, publications, and so on.

As important information to the readers, he also included various governmental and non- governmental organizations dedicated to establishment, management and advocacy in the library sector. Similarly, information about useful topics such as IFLA, ISBN, ISSN, Room to Read, Nepal Library Foundation is also described. In brief it can be said that the publication contains much information about the whole Nepalese library landscape and its relevant associations.

An Inspiring foreword has been written by the new president of IFLA, Ms. Barbara Lison, which enhanced the status of the directory. In the beginning she said "Information is key - right information is the key, but it can only be relevant when it is up-to-date." So the updated publication of Directory of Nepal Library Association members 2021 is a very useful and valuable document. The information provided in the directory has made it very easy to contact librarians through Mobile numbers and other addresses. This is the only document published in Nepal which covers all professional and all other librarians who are involved in this field. This is the continuous effort of our present President.

Activity3: Updated Nepal's Library statistics in IFLA's Library Map of the World (LMW)

The work of inclusion of Nepal's map in the IFLA Library Map of the World was completed and updated during this time. The work was carried out by the former president of the Nepal Library Association, Gita Thapa. Like with other countries, information she included was Nepal' s Regions, Population , Area, Major languages spoken, Library system and Nepalese Library Associations. Languages included were: Nepali language (official), Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Magar, Bajjika, Avadhi, Limbu, Gurung and others spoken in Nepal. The library system in Nepal is still in a developmental stage with these types of libraries present : National library, Public library, University, collage and

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school libraries, government libraries, special libraries, personal libraries, community libraries and children libraries.

Many of these libraries have developed computer based catalogues but still need to adopt modern technology to modernize their libraries. Except school libraries and community libraries all others are financed by the parent body of the institution itself. Community libraries are run by the communities in which they are located. School libraries are financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Library Coordination Unit is responsible for developing policy and legislation concerning libraries in Nepal. Regarding the library associations, there are: the School Library Association, Bhaktapur Library Association, Chitawan Library Association, Community Library Association and Nepal Library Association. The most active one of these library associations is the Nepal Library Association. Gita Thapa is contributing continuously for the LMW since 2016.

Activity 4: TU CDLIS Webinar series

The teachers or professional librarians of Tribhuvan University's Central Department of Library and Information Science (CDLIS) conducted a webinar series on different useful topics inviting resource persons from relevant institutions and libraries when their Physical activities were halted.

- Series #1. Security and preventive measure for library data in Nepal, (resource person, Rajendra Banepali)
- Series #2. Preserving measure of website, (resource person, Chirinjib I. Aadhikari).
- Series. #3. Digital tools for literature searching using Research4life, (resource person, Chandra Bhusan Yadab).
- Series #4. Applying a reference management tool such as Zotero, (resource person, Sanjib Singh).
- Series #5. Global online course for librarians: an orientation programme, (resource person, B.R. Gautam)
- Series #6. Leadership matters in libraries, (resource persons, Bhola K. Shrestha and Indra P. Adhikari)
- Series #7. Localization of DDC and Sears List of Subject Heading: DDC for Satya Sai Baba and Nepali Subject Heading (resource persons, Bina Vaidya and Gita Thapa),
- Series #8. Desirable ratio of staff and services of libraries, (resource persons Rudra P. Dulal, Dasharath Mishra, Ramesh Niraula and others)
- Series #9. Advocacy on IFLA Library Map of the World, (resource person, Gita Thapa)
- Series #10. Symbiotic relation between Libraries and publishers (Resource persons, BishnuKumari, Registrar of copyright office, Dharaj Acharya, former president of FNBSB, Timothi chairman of Book publishers in Nepal, P.L. Shrestha, Yadab C. Niraula and others)

Besides these webinars and regular activities in the Department, the teachers were also engaged in conducting training for regular students like using Ebsco host database, Research 4 life database, Digital library technology, KOHA, Dspace, NepJOL and so on.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many librarians' and information professionals' activities in Nepal like in the other countries of the world. But still they carried out activities through different virtual platforms and disseminated current useful information as stated above. The largest barrier was the inability to meet safely in-person, which is was a very important part of the library service for the working librarians as well as other librarians and information professionals in Nepal.

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