Special Library : Characteristics and Functions

1. **Introduction**

Special libraries often come to existence in order to meet an unsatisfied needs for information in an organization. They are responses to the information needs of geometrically expanding science and technology in the 20th century just as public and educational institutional libraries arose to serve the "universal education" concepts in that century. One of the earliest surveys of Special Libraries in the US (Schick and Howard, 1968) outlined the following criteria for identifying special libraries :

(i)   The library must stress the handling of informational materials rather than recreational or educational materials;

(ii) Generally, the library is part of a larger organization which has non-library objectives;

(iii) The services of the library are limited to furthering the objectives of the sponsor and the collection of the library is delimited by the subject areas of particular interest of the sponsor.

(iv) The librarian and his staff are the principal primary users of the library. It is their function to interpret the body of literature in the collection for the clientele.

Describing the early history of special libraries in the United States where the movement began, Jesse H. Shera (1967) said, " Shortly after the turn of present century, John Cotton Dana (Director, New York Public Library during 1902-29 and First president of Special Libraries Association, 1909-11) arrived at the conclusion that the public library was overlooking an important segment of its potential service by failing to respond to the growing information needs of commerce and industry, and established the Business Branch of the Newark, New Jersy, Public Library where he inaugurated a form of librarianship the future promise of which probably even he did not then realize. Because no one knew what to call this new bibliographic breed, its members acquired the name of "special" librarian. The term was much less felicitous than the idea it represented for it is lacking in specificity and descriptive meaning, but it has persisted for more than half a century despite repeated attempts to define it satisfactorily".

The line of demarcation so separated the special librarians from the others that in 1909 a group under Dana's leadership seceded from the ALA to form their own professional association, by name, Special Library Association (SLA). This was an important milestone and was the beginning of intense professional activities in special librarianship.

2. **Definition of Special library**

Since the special library movement began at the beginning of the last century, many different definitions have been put forth. Every author writing about special libraries, it seems, must begin with a definition. In the early days, definitions often focused on providing information to businesspeople. In the contemporary literature, one way to define special libraries is by what they are not, i.e., any library that doesn't fall into the academic, public or school categories. Another definition includes any library with a specialized collection, and some definitions also include subject departments within academic and public libraries, which are not separate libraries but operate with some degree of autonomy.

The constitution of Special Libraries Association drafted in 1910 defined Special Libraries as "Commercial, industrial, technical, civic, municipal and legislative reference libraries, the special departments of public libraries, universities, welfare associations and business organizations". Further, the definition given in the first issue of the journal, *Special Libraries* was, " all small special libraries throughout the country; financial, commercial, scientific, industrial; and special departments of state, college and general libraries; and in fact, all libraries devoted to special purposes and serving a limited clientage (Source : Murray, 2013).

Writing 40 years later in the same journal, Ruth S. Leonard provided a narrower definition, stating that a special library is not a separate entity, but exists as an integral part of highly specialized kind of organization whether it be an industrial organization, research, or service institution, a trade association, a government agency or a museum. (Leonard, 1950).

Echelman (1976) suggested a definition which synthesizes the previous thoughts in this area. She identified four characteristics of special libraries :

(i)   Organized under the sponsorship of a parent enterprise or organization which provides the funds for its support and continuance.

(ii)   Assigned the mission of acquiring, organizing and providing access to information and knowledge so as to further the goals of its parent enterprise or organization (where the parent organization may not have direct library objectives).

(iii)   Assembling a physical collection of information, knowledge, and/or opinion limited to a single subject or group of subjects or to a single format or group of formats.

(iv)   Administered by a librarian or a specialist in the subject(s) covered or format(s) included.

British Librarian, Wilfred Ashworth defines a special library as, ' one which is established to obtain and exploit specialized information for the private advantage of the organization which provides its financial support' (Ashworth, 1979).

Ellis Mount, in 1983, defined special libraries more generally as "those which are sponsored by business and industrial firms, not-for-profit organizations, government agencies, and professional associations". Mount also included in the definition, "subject-oriented units and departments of public and academic libraries". (Mount, 1983).

Ferguson and Mobley(1984) define the special library as follows : A special library is characteristically a unit or department of an organization primarily devoted to other than library or educational purposes. A special librarian is first an employee, a staff member of the parent organization, and second, a librarian. 'Special' really means library service specialized or geared to the interests of the organization and to the information needs of its personnel. The definition emphasizes three aspects. Firstly, the initiative for establishing special libraries comes not from the library world or from the members of general public, but from organizations which notice a need to provide information service for its employees.

3.   Types of special libraries

Today special libraries are found in a wide range of organizations, such as, Government Departments, Hospitals, Religious institutions, Businesses and industries, Research organizations, Legal establishments, Factories, Museums, Defense establishments, etc.

Law libraries are designed to assist law students, attorneys, judges, and their law clerks, and other individuals conducting legal research including members of the general public. Most law libraries are attached to law schools, private law firms, or government courts for the use of the respective institution's clientele, though some university libraries also maintain a dedicated legal section. Collections of law libraries are tailored to the specific legal interests of the institution they are affiliated and may not have extensive collection beyond that scope.

News libraries are found in offices of newspapers, magazines and media. They basically contain archives of newspapers, magazines and TV programs brought out by the media house. The purpose is to serve reference material for the news people and editorial staff. They hold standard reference books besides the archives of newspapers, magazines and TV programs brought out by the house. Examples of newspaper libraries are : Hindustan Times (Delhi), Eenadu (Hyderabad), Times of India (Mumbai), Deccan Herald (Bangalore), Hindu (Chennai), Dainik Bhaskar (Jaipur), Indian Express (Delhi), Eenadu (Hyderabad).

Medical libraries, also known as hospital libraries or health libraries, are designed to support the needs of physicians, health professionals, medical researchers, medical students, patients, and consumers interested in the medical field. Most medical libraries are intended to assist active medical professionals, researchers, and the public interested in researching the medical field and are attached to hospitals, medical research facilities, medical schools, and similar institutions.

Manuscript libraries preserve manuscripts. They are found in the following cities : Jammu (Sri Rambhir Research Institute), Kolkata (Asiastic Society Library and Government Science College Library), Varanasi (Saraswati Bhavan Library, Bharat Kala Bhavan Library and BHU Library), Allahabad (UP State Manuscript Library), Patan (Hemachandra Jain Gyan Mandir), Baroda (Oriental Institute), Lucknow (Akhila Bharat Sanskrit Parishad), Pune (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute), Satara (Prajna Pathashala Mandala), Mysore (Oriental Research Institute, University of Mysore), Chennai (Adyar Library and Research Center), Thanjavur (Saraswati Mahal Library) and Thiruvananthapuram (Oriental Research Institute, Kerala University) and Delhi (Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts). Some other libraries too, such as National Library, Kolkata and Connemara Public Library, Chennai have good collection of manuscripts.

Military libraries are designed to support the needs of members of a nation's armed forces and other personnel attached to the unit or base that the library is a part of. Often military libraries provide collections and services for families of personnel assigned to the base and also may maintain information on the history of the base, units and notable personnel. Primary responsibilities of the military libraries are assisting military personnel with access to resources for professional development, personal education, and leisure. Other military libraries are tasked with directly supporting military operations by providing pertinent resources or organizing and disseminating information directly related to military units or organization's activities.

Transportation libraries are found at government departments, as well as at universities, and research institutes. They have users which include engineers, city planners, contractors, academic researchers, and the general public. They provide resources related to policy, regulations, operations, and other aspects of transportation.

Museum libraries are found in museums. Museum libraries, unlike traditional libraries, are more private and hidden from the public eye due to their main purpose as a research library for museum staff and

professional researchers. Examples are Salar Jung Museum Library, Hyderabad and National Museum Library, Delhi. Museum libraries are usually focused on one subject or field of study, rather than covering all subject areas.

Theological libraries are found in churches, temples, seminaries, universities, colleges. They assist students, faculty, staff and researchers to advance their knowledge of religion and theology and to better understand its impact on the world. However, most of them are available for use not only for the students, faculty and staff of an institution but also are open for use by researchers and the public in general, though permission from the concerned authorities will have to be obtained. Examples : TTD Temple library,

Secretariat libraries are found in government secretariats and they contain documents and archives which are meant for the officials of the secretariat. Examples include Central Secretariat Library, Delhi, Karnataka Secretariat Library, Bangalore, Kerala Legislature Library, Thiruvananthapuram, Bihar Secretariat Library, Patna, West Bengal Secretariat Library, Kolkata, Legislature Library, Lucknow, Punjab Secretariat Library, Chandigarh, Haryana Civil Secretariat Library, Chandigarh, Secretariat Library, Bhopal, State Secretariat Library, Bhubaneshwar, HP Secretariat Library, Shimla, etc.

A corporate library offers its services to all members of the corporate office of a company. In many places, they are called by other names as Documentation Centers, Information Centers, Technical Information Centers or Resource Centers, and nowadays as Knowledge Resource Centers. Corporate libraries of TCS, Infosys, Mahindra Satyam are examples of corporate libraries. Corporate libraries organize and disseminate information throughout the organization for their own benefit. They often support areas relating to finance, administration, marketing and technical specialization. Information services provided by corporate libraries save employees time, and can aid in competitive intelligence work.

Prison libraries are found in prisons providing reading materials to jail inmates with the purpose of facilitating education, recreation and rehabilitation of inmates. Prison libraries exist in several places including Surat, Thiruvananthapuram, Tihar, Dasna, Viyyur, Madurai, Delhi, etc. The library in Central Prison of Thiruvananthapuram has a collection of 15000 books and it subscribes to several newspapers. The library organizes activities to develop reading habit among the prisoners. At least 80 prisoners use the library daily (Hindu, 2012).

Performing Arts Libraries specialize in collecting items relating to any faction of the performing arts, including music, theatre, dance, film, and recorded sound. Because of the fragility and rarity of the resources, the items are not issued and the usage of the resources are also allowed on special permission. The library of National Centre for Performing Arts (Mumbai) has sound and video recordings in the form of gramophone records, cassettes, CDs, etc. in addition to the books. Membership is open to the general public too.

Braille Libraries contain books in braille and audio materials meant for the people who are unable to use regular printed material because of visual impairment. National Braille Library at Dehra Dun has got both Braille books and Talking Books with over 91000 volumes which can be used by visually impaired people. The Institute has launched an online library too.

4. Characteristics and features of a Special Library

(i)   Purpose : Special libraries are highly specific in purpose and this arises from the integral role which special libraries play in serving the diverse goals of the non-library organization of which they are a part. Advocating the need for special libraries to closely align with policies and objectives of the parent organization, American Librarian John H Richter said, " Special libraries must develop and maintain the closest possible correlation with the policies and aims of the institution they serve in order to retain their ability to respond most closely to the requirements of the staff" (Richter, 1971).

(ii)   Clientele : Special libraries primarily serve the employees/members of the parent organization. The public does not ordinarily walk into these libraries without appointment. Though some special libraries may also serve the public directly (such as Archival Collection department of a Public Library), a large majority of them serve the public indirectly thanks to the widespread cooperation among all types of libraries which make their rich resources available to the public. For instance, resources of ISRO Library, Bangalore, are not available to the public directly, but the public can avail them through inter-library loan scheme of other libraries. Besides, the clientele of special libraries are more specific in demands than the clientele of other types of libraries. Many days might not witness any footfalls to the library at all and the only person using the resources might be the Librarian.

Most of the special librarians, primarily serve a well defined clientele, such as employees of a company, or researchers of their organizations, though they may also allow access to other institutions. Because of this, special librarians are typically more familiar with their clients than other libraries and provide a high level of service.

Secondly, special libraries serve the specialists belonging to a particular organization, such as a research center, defense establishment, business company, hospital, a factory, government department, etc., unlike the school libraries which serve elementary and high school students, the college and university libraries serve college students and faculty members, and public libraries serve people of all kinds at all stages of life. Examples of specialists who use the special library are : scientists, scholars. company executives, government officials, legal experts, military experts, visually impaired people, etc.

(iii) Origin of special library in an organization: Special libraries appear in order to support the mission of their sponsoring organization. Mode of genesis of a special library is the same now as it was in the earliest days – an organization feels the need for help with the information problems of its staff and decides to enlist library skills to help solve them. A number of basic realities may enter into an organization's decision to establish a library. People in many jobs need on-the-job information. Or the organization has probably already invested sizeable sums in books, periodicals and services as required by individuals and departments. This material is probably not well managed or easily available and there are many duplications. Information may be considered as a commodity to be provided like tools and laboratory facilities. In many cases the impetus for establishing a library is the result of the efforts of one individual or one

department. This initiative on the part of the organization is a distinguishing characteristic of special libraries.

(iv) <u>Employed by the same employer as with the clientele :</u> User and the special librarian are employees of the same employer. Responsibility to the same employer puts the librarian on common ground with his clientele. This makes information service based on mutual understanding possible, and this is real, distinctive feature of special library work.

(v) <u>Size :</u> Barring a few exceptions such as NAL, Bangalore, ISRO, Bangalore, IARI Delhi, Desidoc, Delhi, etc., the special libraries tend to be small – in terms of space, staff and collections. In most of the special libraries, the staff is very small, often it is reduced to one or two persons. The librarian has to perform a wide range of tasks including technical, public service and administrative, clerical and often library security such as custody of reading materials. In other words, the special librarians need to be subject specialists on the one hand, and library generalist on the other. Even in larger special libraries, few special librarians can devote themselves to one task, such as cataloguing, the way his counterparts in larger libraries might.

(vi) <u>Setting :</u> Most of the special libraries are part of the larger organization, such as corporation, industry, newspaper office, bank, museum, government department, etc. The special library can also be a part of a larger library system, such as Archival Collection of a University Library, or Science Library of Delhi University Library System. Each setting is unique; each parent organization has its own mission and goals and its own information requirements and locates its library in the organization's structure to suit itself.

(vii) <u>Away from public view :</u> Since the special libraries exist primarily for the benefit of the organization's staff, they are housed in a wide variety of organizational settings, usually away from the public view. They are located in high rise buildings, in industrial complexes, or in research centers, in industrial complexes, or in research centers, industrial organizations such as banks, insurance companies, advertising agencies, public utilities, newspaper offices, chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturers, petroleum producers, engineering firms, and the aerospace and automotive industries, to name a few. These libraries are units of larger organizations whose purposes are usually other than the provision of education or library service. They are housed in organization's offices, laboratories or even in factories. . The public does not ordinarily walk into these libraries without appointment. Therefore, special libraries do not enjoy the privilege of being housed in independent, impressive buildings like university and public libraries which are located in strategic points and beautiful landscape.

(viii) <u>Funding :</u> Sources of fiscal support for special libraries are various and less clear-cut and predictable than those provided for other kinds of libraries. For example, taxes are the principal revenue sources for public libraries. School and academic libraries are largely funded from the budgets of the schools, colleges or universities they serve and these libraries usually have may independent budget as required by accrediting bodies. On the other hand, special libraries may not be independent departments and they are put under larger departments such as Administration, Training, Knowledge Management, R & D, HR, etc. Therefore, the budget for special libraries often forms a part of the larger department. Funding position may shift as the activity within the organization changes. A cut in administration or R & D budget might impact the library spending quickly. In instances of extreme entrepreneurship, in order to get funding support,   the library may have to show increasing revenue by charging fees to the users of its services.

(ix)   Collections : Collections of special libraries are usually narrow with a specific subject focus though many libraries of business and industrial companies have built a good collection in the subject or discipline on which the organization is based. However, mostly the special libraries depend largely on databases and online resources and they have very few books. While an academic library might subscribe to a large number of databases, the special library will confine to a few ones which are directly related to its subject specialty. Special libraries often embrace particular materials and media formats such as reports, films, internally generated documents, reports, etc.

Besides, special libraries, especially those serving businesses and industries, build a good collection of grey literature in the form of press clippings, pamphlets, brochures which contain latest information relating to government, regulatory bodies, legal bodies, financing agencies, etc.

(x)   Librarian supervised by non-librarian : As the the special libraries are small units, they are attached to bigger departments such as Administration, R & D, Training, etc. Therefore, the Special Librarian is supervised by non-librarian in the parent institution. The supervisor may not have a clear idea of what libraries are supposed to do.

(xi)   Nomenclature : Whether seeking to be up-to-date or trying to escape a perceived negative connotation of 'library', the parent institution often will designate the library by other terms, such as, Information Center, Archives, Documentation Service, and so forth. The special librarian is also designated as Documentation Officer or Information Officer.

(xii)   Services are more utilitarian :The very reason the library exists is to save time and efforts on the part of busy people who need precise information for their work and often need it urgently. While the major objectives of other types of libraries may encompass use for education, recreation, aesthetic appreciation, or scholarly purposes, and while some special libraries do have these objectives, the major objective of the special library is a single-ended one : to provide information for immediate and utilitarian purposes in support of the goals of its parent organization. The information function of the special library has been aptly described as providing "…. Answers for the inquirer more rapidly than he could (find them) himself. To this it might be added that it can also provide answers which the inquirer needs but has not thought to request (White, 1973). In other words, these libraries are devoted to utilitarian information service rather than to scholarly or educational needs. "While it is true that a special library has to cope with the normal library functions i.e., collecting, organizing, retrieving and disseminating materials and information, what takes precedence is 'provision of information in support of the objectives of its parent organization… more efficiently and economically than it could be provided by alternate methods" (Ferguson & Mobley, p. 7).

(xiii)   Information work is more intensive : Special librarians are expected to not just connect people with information resources, but to provide specific pieces of information in a readily usable format. Information services in special libraries are often tailor made, and is dependent on the needs of the parent organization. For instance, while a research library sends a weekly list of latest research articles to a scientist of the research center, a business librarian on the other hand, might find it more useful to bring out and make available compilation of industry trends

relevant to the parent company. Specialized service, anticipation of client needs, and quick response to such needs characterize the special library.

Answering telephone or email enquiries forms a large part of the library's activities, because it saves the enquirer from visiting the library for information, and minimizes the interruptions to his work.

A reference interview query in a special library might take considerably more time than in other libraries, but special librarians usually know their clients and the clients' projects well enough to allow them to anticipate information needs.

Besides, the librarians of special libraries spend a lot of time daily in their back office in capacity building in order to handle information enquiries. These include : Browsing information resources and websites, Organizing information materials, Updating collection, Updating IT skills, Building directories of information resources, Training junior staff, Designing web interfaces, etc.

(xiv)   Measuring the effectiveness : Output of a special library is not measurable by the general library parameters such as : number of loans or enquiries dealt with, the number of abstracts prepared, number of photocopies distributed, etc. On the other hand, what really matters is the resultant gain when the organization puts the information obtained by the library to use; this is the true measure of achievement of a special library.

(xv)   Un-predictability of work pressure : Although general libraries have peak periods – for example, lunch times and Saturdays - when larger than usual numbers of the public converge on them, special libraries are likely to be less prone to these occurrences. On the other hand, because information must be provided immediately, special library work will inevitably be subject to varying tempo with occasional times of exceedingly rapid workpace, and high pressure, in a manner which is not always predictable. Such pressures arise with the importance of the demand – sometimes even a single enquiry might set up pressures.

(xvi)   Special libraries are differentiated by limitations in subject scope : Special libraries are oriented to a single subject, or more often, to several related subjects. This subject scope is determined by the field of activity and interests of the library's parent organization. Thus, special libraries are often described in terms of their subject orientation – advertising and marketing, business, finance, law, pharmaceutical, electronics, aerospace, real estate, chemistry, medical, or dental libraries. Some are best described in terms of the form of material – patent libraries and film libraries are best examples. Still others are most aptly described in terms of the parent organization – museum, hospital, or newspaper libraries. In every case, the common characteristic is an orientation to materials and information that is specialized rather than general in character.

5. **Functions of a Special Library** :

Special librarian's functions can be categorized into three broad areas, namely,

(i)   Acquiring materials for the library :

Firstly, the Librarian must build up a balanced collection of material comprehensive in the main interest the organization he/she serves and he should do a careful selection of reference works and textbooks to cover marginal, but important, interests. A significant proportion, perhaps as much as a fifth, will be in languages other than English which would create a demand for a translation service. Wide coverage in the main subjects will be achieved through secondary publications.

(ii)   Organizing materials in the library.
Secondly, he must collect the relevant report material from his own and other organizations with related interests. The cost of production of these reports (in terms of expensive research efforts) is extremely high and it should justify their being indexed in the special library so that the information they contain may be fully exploited. The depth to which they are indexed will depend on the intrinsic importance of the information they carry and also on the rapidity of access required.

(iii)   Disseminating information and materials in the library.
The time spent by user in the information search process is of direct concern to the librarian in special libraries. Since both librarian and the user are in the payrolls of the organization, no librarian would like to see the user wasting their time in the library wading through the maze of information. Therefore, the spirit of the 4th Law of Library Science, ie 'Save the time of the user' is absolutely vital in special libraries. There must be a realization that users and the library staff work together in the information search work. In the interest of saving total time and achieving an overall minimum cost to the organization, the special librarian will take over from the user a number of tasks which would be his in a more conventional library. Users will, for example, be kept informed of new developments in their own fields of interest. All materials coming to the library , including secondary publications, will be scanned for information of potential value to the individual users whose 'profiles' of interests will be known to the library staff. As a part of this activity they will received a current awareness, or alerting service in the form of a bulletin of news, abstracts and addition to the library; or the information may be presented in the form of a digest or summary. It is more efficient for the library staff to do this because they are trained to know sources of information, and to handle them efficiently. They develop skills in the process by doing it constantly. One result is that library users are freed to spend more time on their own work. Experience has shown that it is more profitable to the parent organization if from two third to three fourth of information search is taken over by the library. By doing so it is possible to save from half to two third of the total cost to the organization of its literature searching (Ashworth, p 11-12).

The following table serves as a checklist of functions a special library does. These functions are categorized into minimum, intermediate and high levels of service.

Table 1 . Functions in special libraries

	Minimum level	Intermediate level	Higher level

Acquiring materials for the library	. Collect publications received throughout the organization, check their relevancy to the organization . Keep abreast of the organization's general interests and need for both print and e-resources. . Review announcements of new publications and new information resources, databases, selecting and procuring them.	. Keep abreast of the developing information needs of the organization and selecting materials in anticipation of the actual requirement. . Establish contact with the vendors of books, magazines, standards, conference proceedings, reports, maps, online resources, etc for quick supply of resources. . Maintain a complete order file and follow up when required. . Review the library's collections and build up weak areas. . Establish a system for evaluating library and information resources and weeding out the materials not required.	. Research user needs periodically. . Establish contacts with experts and dealers of hard-to-get materials such as reports, out of print publications, rare books, translations, unpublished materials, foreign materials, etc . Build an archive of all publications of the parent organization, such as MDP course materials, Archives, Reports, Faculty reprints, Soft copies, etc. . Prepare a written selection policy . Continuously develop the systems for efficient acquiring of information materials.
Organizing materials in the library	. Shelve the books on shelves, CDs, etc. in a simple, logical order – for example, by author, title or by broad subject grouping. . Display the magazines/periodicals title-wise. . Establish a simple filing system for ephemeral materials such as pamphlets, press dippings, etc . Devise a simple computerized catalog of all important library materials, both printed and digital	. Catalog all library materials, assign subject headings and prepare machine readable catalogs. . Classify all printed materials as per a standard classification scheme. . File the pamphlets, dippings, and other ephemeral materials as per standard subject headings. . Devise a specific filing and indexing system for special collection such as patents, maps, pictures, drawings, manuscripts, etc	. Developing special classification schemes, expanded schemes and thesauri tailored to its needs. . Index articles, reports, patents, standards and other materials in depth, using new technologies. . Prepare abstracts of published materials. . Build an institutional repository of all publications and documents brought out by the parent organization. . Build databases of information materials, if required. . Scan/microfilm old materials according to IPR policy . Continuously develop the computerized systems for the organizing of information resources in the library.
Disseminating information and materials from the library	. Maintain a collection of reference books and online sources. . Answer simple, factual reference questions using both printed and online sources. . Identify titles of publications and verify reference sources. . Direct users needing detailed or research information to possible sources outside the library. . Route new issues of magazines to people whose interests are known. . Know the sources of local libraries well enough for full utilization.	. Gather research materials pertinent to a question and transmit them to the requester. . Prepare selective bibliographies/reading lists. . Undertake comprehensive literature searches on request. . Distribute lists of current literature received, including abstracts wherever possible. . Familiarize with nationwide library resources in pertinent subject fields . Participate in co-operative library networks	. Locate, synthesize and evaluate information from a wide range of sources and provide it in concise summary form. . Prepare critical bibliographies. . Prepare evaluative, comprehensive literature searches . Distribute library-prepared abstracts of current literature received. . Deliver Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service to users using IT. . Develop database of institutional and human sources of information. . Improve and develop computerized systems for information searches and delivery.

6. Services in a Special Library

Services in special libraries have the objective of saving the time of specialists besides improving their productivity in the parent organization. Some services in specialists are listed below :

(i) Current awareness : The purpose is to keep the user abreast of the developments in his/her area of work. The librarian scans through the various journals, websites, library books additions and sends information about the latest articles, new books added, news, etc to the user.

(ii) Content pages : Content pages of journal articles are photocopied or scanned and sent to the user. On receiving it, in case the user needs any full text of the article is required, it is also sent to the user.

(iii) Abstracting : Though most of the journals are covered in the abstracting periodicals, there are still many magazines and grey literature which are not covered though they serve as useful sources of information in special libraries. Providing abstracts of relevant papers serve as useful tools in information search.

(iv) Indexing : Maintaining a subject index of relevant reference materials especially grey literature which is not covered in databases will be useful.

(v) Bibliograrphies/Literature search : Providing a list of books, articles, web-documents related to an area of research helps the user when he/she embarks on a research project.

(vi) SDI : Provides the user periodically a highly selective list of reference materials such as list of latest articles, list of additions, etc. This service helps the reader to keep abreast of developments.

(vii) Translation : While English is the window to a large part of global research output, important researches are reported in other languages too such as Spanish, French, German, Japanese, Russian and Chinese. Translation of the papers will have to be arranged, if required.

(viii) Document delivery : No library is self sufficient. Therefore, articles, books, patents, standards, etc will have to be obtained from other libraries if the need arises. NISCAIR, Delnet, British Library (UK) are some of the sources which arrange to send documents against nominal charges.

(ix) Press clippings : News items serve as valuable sources of information many times as they cover items much before they appear in periodicals and databases. A large number of newspapers are not indexed in the internet and therefore, maintaining a press clippings file of select news clippings relevant to the organization will be useful.

(x) Information research : In this, the librarian provides the information to the user after searching several sources. The enquiries are received through email, telephone or by personal visit to the library. Nowadays many libraries have provided 'Ask a Librarian' facility on the library website. The topic can be too simple, such as 'Who is the author of the book, '*Freakanomics'* or 'Provide a list of latest articles on '*Contribution of electromagnetic launching to Space Flight*' . It could be a simple fact finding enquiry such as 'What is today's Rupee conversion rate for Japanese Yen ? or ' Trends in the rupee conversion rate for Japanese Yen during the past 5 years'

7. Special libraries as Knowledge Management centers

Increasingly, special libraries function as knowledge management centers in industries and businesses. The KM responsibilities the libraries undertake (Ajiferuke, 2003) are :

      (i)   Design of information architecture;
      (ii)   Development of taxonomy;
      (iii)   Content management of intranet;
      (iv)   Provision of information for the intranet;
      (v)   Gathering competitive intelligence;
      (vi)   Providing research service for the KM team
      (vii)   Virtual reference service

Though special libraries are already performing several roles as Knowledge Management Centres, there are certain gaps, especially in respect of proactively gathering and sharing tacit knowledge. Emphasizing the need for scaling up the KM responsibilities, Underwood and Smith (2012) have identified the following responsibilities to be performed so that the special library can function as effective Knowledge Management Centers.

(i) Establishing Expertise databases and assisting with establishing communities of practice in order to create and enhance interaction and communication among colleagues;

(ii) Maintaining effective content management of all resources, which includes appropriate classification and keyword assignment for all resources;

(iii) Maintaining and updating a thesaurus (subject headings list(

(iv) Maintain an effective online retrieval system;

(v) Effective organization and centralized bibliographic control of independent collections scattered throughout the Department;

(vi) Maintaining an effective centralized and integrated online database/electronic archive;

(vii) Maintaining access to electronic resources locally, nationally and internationally;

(viii) Organization and content management of all in-house reports and special documents;

(ix) Providing a proactive information dissemination service i.e., a customized information 'push and pull' service;

(x) Establishing and maintaining a proactive collection development policy;

(xi) Updating information profiles at regular intervals;

(xii) Liaison with all users on matters pertaining to the function of Knowledge Management Center;

(xiii) Managing the Knowledge Management Center budget;

(xiv) Establishing the foundation for a sound organizational memory by capturing tacit and explicit knowledge; indexing content; creating unified electronic database and providing access to the database;

(xv) Ensuring efficient functionality of the Knowledge Management Center;

(xvi) Journals administration;

(xvii) Information Retrieval; and

(xviii) Collection building.

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