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OPEN ACCESS

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OPEN ACCESS SYSTEM & IT'S PROBLEMS

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Introduction :

In ancient times the thoughts were brought out by hand on clay tablets, velum, bhojpatra, etc. With the discovery of paper these were written, and afterwards printed, on paper, and named as book.

The book, recently termed as 'documents' include all types of reading material-such as manuscripts, printed papers, reprints, photo-states, microfilms, microfisch, microcards and other recorded thoughts, in any physical form.

From the age, when the documents were kept under chains, to the modern age, in which free use of documents is a must, uptodate and capable current has been flowing through the documents. Free and close contact with the documents may be possible in two ways :

1. Within the library—in a reading room.
2. Outside the library—through circulation section.

Need :

In order to save the time of readers and the library staff and to establish direct contact between documents and the readers the need for open-access-system was felt. Now, almost, all modern libraries are finding it useful.

The open-access system could avoid the wastage of unlimited man-hours of readers in just waiting for the books and of the staff for searching, bringing and restoring the books on shelves. The time thus saved could be utilised in some more constructive work.

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The open-access system proved as a cure to the inefficient and restricted service of the library which was being felt by readers as a hurdle. Under this system library stacks are open to all the readers in which they may browse at their will. They may inspect and select the material of their choice.

Why Open-Access ?

In spite of certain problems like misplacing, disorder in the arrangement of the books, mutilation and losses, this system, is being followed in all modern libraries due to the under mentioned uses :—

1. It promotes self-help habit among readers.
2. It gives an insight to the readers regarding the range of collection on a particular subject.
3. It gives due publicity to new arrivals and also gives chance to dormant books, to be referred by the readers.
4. It inspires the readers to know about other documents of interest.
5. It teaches classification scheme followed in a library itself. Without any burden the readers can remember the class numbers.
6. It saves the time of readers.
7. It facilitates the staff to utilize and promote library services efficiently.
8. It is economical.

Why Misplacement ?

The books are misplaced because :—

1. The readers try to replace the books on the shelves themselves.
2. Limited number of copies of books are available and there are more readers desirous to read a particular book.
3. Some readers wilfully try to create obstructions to the

other readers by hiding or misplacing the books.

To avoid misplacement of books the readers should be asked not to replace the books on the shelves. Shelf rectification be done periodically in addition to annual physical verification. The facility of having reservation, provision of more copies for circulation and for reference may decrease the misplacement of books in the library.

Why Mutilation ?

Mutilation is another great problem of open-access system. Sometimes it is reported by some readers that a page, a figure, a diagram, a table, a map or any thing important and connected to their topic is torn out, defaced or damaged out of a book or journal. This is the worst type of misuse of library collection.

The books are mutilated because :—

1. Shortage of time at the disposal of readers to take notes.
2. Unwilling to work hard.
3. Lack of vigilance.
4. Lack of alternatives.
5. Lack of cheap reprographic aids. In copying the contents of an article or chapter of a book.

It has been observed that the readers also try to mutilate books in the following circumstances :

1. Library is going to be closed for that day.
2. Circulation is going to be closed for sometime for examination days or any other reason.
3. Books issued could not be fully read before the due date and there is no hope to get the book reissued.
4. To take note is not possible due to technical drawbacks, photographs and graphs etc.
5. To take note of that portion which is more time consuming.

Keen vigilance and or copying facilities like Zerox or Majox at cheap rates can prove helpful to avoid mutilation of documents.

Why Loss Of Books ?

Library is a workshop where books and other reading materials are the tools used by the readers in the same manner as the tools are used in a workshop or in a factory. There is considerable loss or depreciation every year in a workshop which is inevitable. As the books are used, referred, circulated and stored in a library, the loss or a depreciation, is also inevitable. The readers are taken to be generally honest, but casually honest and dishonest or criminal readers create the problem of loss in a library because :

1. They want to possess the books for building up their own collection at home.
- 2, They want to cause harm to the library staff as well as to the readers by way of restraining the use of good books.
3. It has become their habit.
4. The library staff is too liberal in matter of keeping on the collection.
5. There is no penalty for doing this evil act, even on detection.
6. There is no sufficient watch on "out-going" and "in-coming" documents.

The following measures are suggested to check stealing of library books :

1. Arrangements of keeping the personal belongings of the readers at the entrance of the library safely.
2. A double record system of circulation may be adopted to avoid the blames on the part of the staff.
3. Respectable and highly designated personalities may be assigned the chacking job.
4. Enterance and exit of the library must be only one and it may never be left without the cheking staff.

5. There must not be any place other than the gate from where a document of the library may slip out.
6. Strict watch not only at the gate but inside the stacks and reading rooms should be kept.
7. Frequent visits by high officials of the library in and outside the library.
8. Maintaining partly closed-access for important documents.
9. A sense of high moral may be cultivated among the library users from time to time.

Responsibility for Losses :

No doubt the librarian is a custodian of books. He has to collect the documents not only for preservation but for dissemination also. If he restricts the use of the library collection only for sake of the safety of books, the entire aim of establishing the library is gone. Service is the motto of library staff and with such high aims, library personnel need not be suspected to be dishonest to the profession. The Advisory Committee for Libraries, 1959 headed by Sri K.P. Sinha, strongly recommended that the practice of fixing the responsibility of the librarian for paying the cost of books lost should be put to an end, and no State Governmen should require a librarian to furnish security or to pay for the loss of books unless gross negligence or dishonesty is proved against him. Loss of 3 books per thousand circulation is justified.

Conclusion :

To get a better and prompt service a small percentage of loss is to be borne with. Open-access system has wide range of advantages but on the same deck, it carries some drawbacks. The service rendered through this system is far more valuable than the losses incurred. Hence, it may be followed in all the modern service libraries with the least care of losses keeping strict watch, having cordial relations between the users and the library staff.

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“Knowledge is of two kinds; We know a subject ourselves or we know where we can get information upon it.”

SAMUEL JOHNSON—1709-1784