

# Unleashing the journey of resurrection: from a traditional library to digital library – the case of the Indian Council of World Affairs

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper attempts to unravel the journey of Sapru House library (Indian Council of World Library) from a passive manual library to an active electronic library. A case study of the library provides insights on the digital initiatives underway. It highlights the issues, concerns and working of a completely offline library backed by huge resources consisting of books, journals, press-clippings, microfilms, maps and other documents. It gives an account of the manual management of the resources and their service provision. Further, the paper examines the reasons for the digital initiatives and the how the challenges and obstructions were met and overridden. Indian Council of World Affairs library has a huge resource base which was collected since its' inception. It is an academic library and also enjoys the status of being a repository library of the European Union and United Nations. A unique and matchless collection of bound volumes of newspapers (since 1933), press clippings (since 1964) and rare books (between 1700- 1900) constitute 70% of its total collection. The League of Nations (1920-1945) reports, a precursor to United Nations, supplements the ICWA collection further. Housing, storage, preservation, conservation, management, dissemination and retrieval were underlying reasons that inspired us here to transform this valued collection to a digital repository of knowledge. This paper gives a detailed account of the conception of the digital initiatives vis-à-vis the digital project, outlines, reports, discussions, presentations, approvals, sanctions, funding, execution, implementation and the outcome and realization of the dream.*

**Keywords:** Digital Library; Traditional Library; ICWA; Library Modernisation; Library Automation

## BACKDROP

It is a matter of pride to work at Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), an institution that is steep in glorious history and past. It came into existence in 1943 as a non-political and non-governmental organization. Its hallowed halls are witness to many a great Indian Leaders who have shaped the future of India. The Indian Council of World Affairs is also recognized as a seat of highest intellectual activity on International Affairs supplemented by a huge and vast resource contained in the library on matters relating to international relations, world affairs and formulation of foreign policy. Many thinkers including Hon.

First Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, Hon. Vice President Dr Hamid Ansari have utilized the immense resources of this library (Krishan, 1973).

Eminent personalities, key government officials from all over the world visited and guided the development of Sapru House. The House hosted important events such as the Asian Relations Conference organized in 1947, addressed by Mahatma Gandhi. Ms Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, herself guided and supervised the Asian Relations conference. Dignitaries from all over the world were invited to grace the occasion and discuss in finer details outlining and formulation of their country's foreign policies. This institute buzzed with intellectual activity during the conference exchanging ideas in thought provoking discussions. Sapru house continued to benefit from the aid and assistance provided by the participating heads of different countries (Krishan, 1973).

### **SAPRU HOUSE LIBRARY**

Libraries have always been instrumental in opening new vistas of knowledge and understanding for their readers. There are a number of libraries in the vicinity of Sapru House library but none was committed passionately to resurrect and regenerate the glory of the past.

The Indian Council of World Affairs library popularly called as Sapru House library being an academic library also came in existence in 1943. It supplemented the aspirations of a think tank vis-à-vis complimented research in international relations, world affairs and foreign policy. Distinguished leaders, noted scholars, top luminaries in India have made use of the resources of Sapru House library and were instrumental in the development of this place as an institute of national pride and importance. In the quest to make Sapru House library as one of the finest institutions of the world donations in the likes of books, journals, maps and other documents were received by visiting dignitaries. MOUs, pacts and exchange agreements were collected thus making the library as one of the most coveted research libraries on International Relations. People from all walks of life visited Sapru House and made use of the immense resources and got benefited. Major institutions viz. 'Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis', "School of International Studies (later merged with famous Jawahar Lal Nehru University)", "Press Trust of India", "Children Film Society" were all founded here in the ICWA premises (Girja Kumar 1973).

The Library also hold special collections covering a host of subjects such as international relations, world affairs, foreign policy, political history and economics. It has a rich collection of 1,25,000 books, 28,000 bound volumes of journals and about 700,000 press clippings. The bound volumes of Hindu Newspaper from 1933 onwards, press clippings dating back to 1964 from 8 National and 4 Regional newspapers further constitute this immense resource, with a repository of League of Nations, United Nations and European Union documents. The resource base of the library has been strengthened further by adding important, core journals in world affairs from key institutions like the foreign affairs, pacific affairs etc.

### **NEED OF MODERNISATION**

An information retrieval mechanism which is simple, user friendly, secure, fast, snappy, current and is available just at the click of the mouse button is what attracts a researcher

to browse a library. Automation and computerization imply infrastructural digitization that enhances the delivery of information by making it simple, swift, smooth and seamless whereas digitization of the library resources preserves and conserves the available heritage, thereby safeguarding the interests of the researchers. These processes lend ease and convenience to the researcher in using information whenever, wherever required in a secure and comfortable environment.

Modernisation also implies being abreast and in sync with today's needs. Globally the libraries are endeavouring to reach to the desktops of the readers to provide them the much needed and relevant information. The technology gives an edge to a librarian to flip through the loads of information and sift the one which is required by the reader. It helps repackaging information and sending "the" information to the user.

Today's library users need simple solutions that are easy to manage and faster to navigate. Flipping through the card catalogue and reaching to the right resource does not seem to attract the reader of today. Libraries globally are employing the various modern technologies, simplifying the information provision mechanisms thus making the lives of researchers easier. Faster navigational tools help the researcher to reach the right information in virtually lesser time and efforts thereby saving a lot of time to reach the right information.

Our past collection historically was restricted to books, journals, press clippings United Nation's and European Union Documents. The library was constrained to have limited membership, seating, new books, offline journals and press clippings whose retrieval was highly labour intensive and could only be retrieved through a card catalogue. The entire information retrieval mechanism was manual and offline, time taking and cumbersome (Krbec and Paika, 1994).

## **INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS**

The ICWA library remained in debilitated condition and remained dormant for over three decades. It lacked direction and leadership. There was no one to take responsibility and onus to move the library in sync with today's user needs. The resource crunch was felt and there was a compelling need to resuscitate the library. The trend has now reversed in ICWA library after many years of progressively declining membership, low usage levels and lesser footfalls. It is a different story altogether for the library. It all started with the re-engineering of the library with a focussed approach on resurrecting it from shambles.

We have presently endeavoured to address some of the key problems by enhancing seating, addition of new books, proper signage and communication with our readers on one hand and by applying technology on the other hand. A lot of energy presently is focussed on reviving the past glory of this library. The ambience of the library has been greatly enhanced; with new furniture. The entire library is regularly cleaned and dusted. Pest control is regularly carried out to avoid any damage to our holdings. Water seepage and other mutilating effects to the collection have been taken under control. Central air-conditioning has been restored giving respite to the readers.

The massive pruning of the stock has been done to ensure stock quality. New addition of books is being made regularly adding vital resources to the holdings and strengthening it further. Unwanted material has been withdrawn, binding of documents is underway to ensure that no valuable book is in bad shape and new journals are being added to ensure

that the current trends are shared with the researchers. Also, online databases have been secured to supplement the much needed information in the form of archival content.

A blue print was developed after careful study of the resources available, the information provided to the users, technology interface and funding required, for carrying out and realizing the entire modernization project. This helped break down the entire project into micro tasks, fixing the deadlines, expenditure required, identifying the skill sets of staff and assigning each one jobs accordingly.

## **LIBRARY AUTOMATION, RETRO-CONVERSION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RFID TECHNOLOGY**

### **(a) Library Automation**

Automation and computerization entail making the collection electronically available. The Sapru House library came into existence in 1943 and the collection was collected bit by bit through purchases, gifts, gratis and complimentary copies under various exchange arrangements.

In automation, each title of the book from the collection is added in the database of collection by creating an entry for each book through the author, title, subject, keyword and the class number. All the fields that will eventually help the user to secure a particular title, are being fed in with the accession number against each entry registering a particular book in the collection.

### **(b) Retro Conversion**

Retro conversion is the conversion of a library's collections from paper to online format so that readers can access a library's holdings through an online catalogue. Resources are very likely to be overlooked by researchers, whatever their potential value for research, if they are not online. It is the art of uncovering the hidden resources and providing them visibility.

Retro-conversion implies the preparation of the entry of each title from the physical collection of books, classifying and cataloguing them respectively following a particular scheme of classification. The existing scheme of classification is changed to the most helpful and user-friendly scheme along with the helpful scheme of cataloguing. These practices will help the user and staff alike. Retro conversion will make the ICWA collection visible to the entire world which cannot be expected through the card catalogue. The entire stock of the collection could be flipped through and easily sifted using the OPAC (online public access catalogue). Any user searching a title could reach (a) a particular title, (b) all the titles by the same author, (c) alternative titles written on the same subject, and (d) any other additional information available in the library (Line, 2006).

#### **Why Retro conversion**

- ✓ It provides easy access
- ✓ Brings visibility to material for research
- ✓ Remove difficulties in accessing/browsing collections
- ✓ Provide relation to other collections which have already been catalogued

- ✓ Satisfy users' need and in sync with today
- ✓ Provide opportunities of collaborative work
- ✓ Prevent low usage of collections
- ✓ Encourage high usage of collections

#### Advantages of Retro conversion

Retrospective conversion or backlog clearance gives users a more comprehensive picture of the collection. It makes their research easier and enables them to plan their work more effectively. It provides online and remote access to libraries and their collections. It extends the intellectual access through collaborative efforts of in making the contents of a wide range of libraries through the development of a union catalogue of serials and books. It secures long-term retention, storage and access to low-use printed material. It provides a correct and comprehensive picture of the library holdings to the researchers. It has improved users' ability to search the whole collection, and leads to increased use of previously undiscovered material. The retro-conversion provides increased access and knowledge of collections to library staff as well as wider academic community. It tremendously improves the time taken to answer queries more speedily and efficiently. The impact of this exercise is not only limited to the local research community or to a national community but to international audience too because of the visibility of the collections through an online catalogue. Being able to access the information with the click of a mouse incredibly speedens up research connections as well as provide archival information, to the user. Material is much more accessible and less time searching means more time actually is devoted to study research material. The opportunity to share expertise and develop common solutions to difficulties, are some of the beneficial aspect of retro-conversion project.

In summary the benefits of retro-conversion are:

- ✓ increased visibility, awareness and accessibility of library collections
- ✓ increased use of both catalogues and collections
- ✓ enhance the quality of records and improve the functionality of catalogues
- ✓ enhanced collaboration between libraries

### **(c) Implementation of RFID Technology**

What is RFID?

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) provides for "sightless" or no line of sight identification of items. It facilitates circulation, re-shelving, and theft detection, and it has several other important advantages. It can either replace or supplement existing library bar codes. When the costs of labour is taken into consideration for tasks such as checkout, check-in, inventory holds, lists, mis-shelved items, etc., RFID can prove to be very efficient when compared to traditional bar codes. "RFID is a combination of radio-frequency-based and microchip technology. The information contained on microchips in the tags affixed to

library materials reads radio frequency technology regardless of item orientation or alignment (i.e., the technology does not require line-of-sight or a fixed plane to read tags as do traditional theft detection systems) and distance from the item is not a critical factor except in the case of extra-wide exit gates" (Boss, 2010).

#### Why RFID?

The size of the collection of any library has a direct impact on the tasks such as receiving, processing, sorting and shelving. Hence if the collection is bigger then these tasks become massive, labour intensive and time consuming. The biggest asset of RFID technology is that it helps saving time of the library professionals which can then be diverted and focused on creative contribution on other library aspects. Secondly the strength of library staff size remains more or less the same while circulation and materials management increases substantially with the passage of time. Librarians of today are focusing on bigger issues of newer technologies, digitization, marketing and promotion of library products and services rather than shelving. Thus RFID provides a solution to automate and help staff divert the energies to the business of customer service and management. "The use of RFID reduces the amount of time required to perform circulation operations. The most significant time savings are attributable to the facts that information can be read from RFID tags much faster than from bar codes and that several items in a stack can be read at the same time."

### **DIGITIZATION OF PRESS-CLIPPINGS, NEWS PAPER & RARE BOOKS**

#### **(a) Objectives**

The need for preservation along with easy accessibility is the underlying, compelling reason of this ambitious initiative, taking care of the huge resources available in the ICWA and preserving it for posterity. In view of the above, the primary objective of the proposed initiative is to preserve and conserve the entire collection of press-clippings, rare books and bound volumes of newspapers collected since 1943 by ICWA library. Once the documents are scanned and converted to digitized format, preservation of the original will be for a longer period. To improve accessibility of all the relevant information and making it available physically as well as electronically via the net, e.g. information contained in the press-clippings, bound volumes of journals and newspapers, rules of the ICWA library, eligibility criterion related to membership and online catalogue of all the documents, etc. This will help reach scholar at their desktops. The availability of this resource on the web will help researchers retrieve the exact information they are looking for. Once they visit the library they can then focus on their themes immediately without further wasting anytime in locating what they need.

To provide information to a large number of scholars without their having to come physically to the library in future, the institute will provide access to data over the net. To enhance the ability to search the various documents and articles based on subjects, dates, themes or any other criteria making a tremendous amount of data easily available on various subjects matter for research.

#### **(b) Highlights of the Endeavor**

- ✓ A web based application, which will digitize, archive and retrieve old files, records and documents occupying large office space. The application would facilitate search based on user defined queries, strings, parameters, etc.

- ✓ The stored documents will be accessible over internet and intranet. The application would be simple to use, lean in terms of resources, secure, extremely user-friendly and without boundaries.
- ✓ The original contents of documents, books, etc. will be preserved so that no modification is permissible to them by anyone.
- ✓ Scanning of news paper articles, files, bound journals, loose issues, rare books, conference reports, publications, press-clippings etc.

### **(c) Action Plan**

The scanning and indexing work of the press-clippings, rare books and newspaper articles is carried out in phases. This automatically generates metadata and indexes the digitized documents. Data compression techniques are used to optimize the storage space, without compromising on the quality and time for retrieval of information. The noise is cleared making the sharp image with increased clarity. Once a document is digitalized, it cannot be deleted from the archived data by any person. The scanning entails creation of images in pdf format and storing it in the computer. The scanned images are kept according in a batch of 100 to 150 images. Physically the scanned files are stored according to batch numbers to provide ready reference if it has to be physically accessed and searched. After the metadata is created, the scanned images are fed in the software which is created after anticipating the needs of the researchers. The efficacy of the software depends on how promptly it leads to the required information without taking much time. These attributes while developing the software had been dealt with utmost sensitivity and care. The software is web enabled and an open source application and can run on the web without any problem. Development and customization of technical and user manuals has been done for ready reference and trouble shooting. Extensive and intensive training of ICWA staff is underway to help curb the initial teething problems.

### **(d) Outcome of the Digitization Project**

The biggest achievement of the digitization project has resulted in the preserving and securing the vital reservoir of information on International Relations and making it available to future generations. This endeavour will internationalize the ICWA library bringing it to the fore, ahead of other think tanks in bringing the ease of searching information from the vast reservoir. It will set the trends for other similar organizations to follow which are storehouses of information. Researchers will be able to access information 24X7 anytime, anywhere. A manual library has become most modern, electronic, automated, upgraded and abreast with latest technology. Retrieval of information has become fast and easy. Information is available at the click of the mouse. Information can be accessed across national and international boundaries. The library will become more user-friendly and will result in efficient inventory management and security. The library will be able to reach by large number of readers through the medium of its online resources. It will be at a platform from where it will network with national and international organizations, libraries, professional bodies and institutions.

### **ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

However, the process of replacing or duplicating card catalogues is labour-intensive, but it yields in making the library current and information rich. The decision to replace the manual library to an electronic library needed patience, perseverance, immediate, mid-

term and long term planning, execution, implementation and evaluation. The mindset and the skills set of the library professionals needed to be in sync with the direction, vision and aspiration of the decision makers. The decision to bring ICWA library to the fore has been tough and challenging due to lack of vision and commitment of personnel, their mind sets and attitudes.

The first issue involved is funding. The task of infrastructural digitization involved a substantial amount of budget allocation, apart from the routine spending on the library. The budget was clearly broken into major tasks and sub-tasks and each one was clearly defined. The work sheets, flow chart and the comparison of quotations helped to define the expenditure, time required and all the tasks. A well produced report and presentation helped in getting clearance from all requisite channels.

Once funding had been in place then we focussed on staffing - especially we needed trained and dedicated manpower. The skilled manpower helped us to realize the dream and the aspiration. 'It is always better to have dedicated team of staff to work on a particular project rather than fitting the additional work in with other duties of the staff on the rolls'. There was a compelling need of exposing staff to modern technologies by upgrading their skills set through constant training and development programmes.

Cataloguing standards and classifications were another source of concern. A universally accepted format for data storage and retrieval, an up-to-date internationally-recognized classification scheme was required over an in-house adaptation. The selection of the schemes of classification and cataloguing was based on their adaptability and user-friendliness.

The importance of software and the hardware here cannot be overlooked as these are the backbone of any contemporary technology in use. The choice of software depended on some very important key features such as adaptability, customization, user-friendliness, simplicity, sturdiness, storage, processing etc. The fields of the software were carefully developed so that it could remain in business for a longer period of time. The sound hardware equipment complimented the software by giving provision to carry out the expected processing and transactions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Employing technology will not only attract old and new members alike but will enhance their overall experience of visiting the ICWA library. A beginning in all these areas has already been made and we have already seen the impact amongst our members as well as staff. Membership is up from 200 one year back to 1000 currently, increased in the seating capacity from a mere 40 to 200 in the reading lounge. We hope to collect, automate, conserve, preserve and disseminate information besides offering computerized, online and e-services to users. We now are already on a path to follow current trends and upgrade our collection and services by quality stock with RFID tags, trouble free security and inventory, e-books, e-Journals, online databases, digitized press clippings, bound volumes of newspapers, and rare books. Retrieval of information has become a lot easier and user-friendly. The process of accessing documents is now extremely fast. Information retrieval is possible based on author, content, topic and keywords specific searches. Additionally inventory management has become more scientific and organized. The trends in terms of user preference have become clearer because of the detailed analysis of borrowing data



and will lead to focused procurement based on data thereby making the library more responsive to user's needs. However the future holds great promise with a fully computerized RFID collection, computerized catalogue, online journals, web online public access catalogue, video-conferencing, digitized press clippings, smart membership cards. This is further enhanced by having user-friendly classification scheme, increased internet accessibility and proper display of content.

Our presence can also be felt on the web-site. Researchers now find it easy to reach to the required information. The overall journey to information is quick and flawless. Up-gradation of facilities and amenities have been much appreciated by our members, however we cannot be satisfied with our achievements of the past and need to seriously carry forward the process of up-grades and modernization to set trends and help others to dream and aspire.

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