

Right to Information and Role of Libraries and Information System in Nepal

Dr. Madhusudan Karki
Founder Head Dept of LIS, TU

Importance of information

Information, as a vital resource for problem solving, decision making, education and knowledge updating, has no boundaries. Everybody, state and society requires it to achieve their goals and objectives. Therefore it is considered as a power resource as equal to other natural resources. In some cases it is more important than other resources. It has played significant role for the overall development of the societies since ancient time. Hence, information, as an important asset, has come up as the driver of all scientific, technological, social, economical and political activities. And information is also considered as a basic need of human beings. D.A. Kemp has recognized information as a basic need of human beings ranking after air, water, food and shelter.¹

Information is globally the fastest growing sector, which grows approximately at 5 percent per year as compared to the world economy growth of approximately 3 percent. There is growing tendency to access relevant and potential information with no time lost. The increasing volume and the redundancy of information pose problems of information handling and facilitation of timely access to relevant and needed information. Therefore, the reorganization, acquisition, storage, process, retrieval and dissemination of right information to the right users without loss of time are challenging job.

Emergence of Libraries

The emergence of libraries is the outcome of the ideas of civilized members of the society. The educated circle felt the need of a place where they want to keep all written records/ information of whatever sorts and in whatever forms for protection and preservation. Protection and preservation were specially being done just to get the relevant records / information as and when they were in need of them. The civilized ancestors were in view of that the libraries could be an effective means to gather the wealth of information generated by man over the years for the present and for posterity. With the passage time, the library became an indispensable organization of educated and civilized society. A scientifically developed and designed library and information systems perform the duty of cultural institution which establish good relation between bodies and boundaries, at the level of the individual, nation-state, community and across the state for information services. The responsibility of such cultural institutions is to create, select, acquire, preserve, store, process, retrieve, disseminate and to market

¹ D.A. Kemp, The Nature of knowledge; an introduction to libraries , London, Clive Bingley, p.28,1976.

information such as music, film, radio and television program, CD Rom, floppy disc, books, journals, newspapers etc from all over the world. Such cultural institutions are public, semi-public, government or private, which perform a mission beyond mere commercial interests, consisting of providing cultural products and services and making them accessible to a large public without territorial consideration. The use of ICT in traditional cultural institution e.g. library and museum has been an authentic means of creating a global village of information.

Right to Information and LIS situation in Nepal

The information needs of Nepalese are varied and growing in nature due to the growth of literature and highly educated citizens. The Government of Nepal has provided some facilities for information dissemination to general public through different channels, methods, media and techniques. There is constitutional provision for free access to information to all the citizens of Nepal. The constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal has provided many fundamental rights to the people of Nepal. Article 16 is the “Right to Information”. Every citizen has the right to demand and receive any information of public importance.²

Library and information systems can be considered as the foundation to fulfill the objective of Right to information of Nepalese. Such systems can provide the facilities of laboratories for information access to meet the varieties of information needs of heterogeneous users. Both the subjects e.g. Right to information and Library and information systems are interlinked and interdisciplinary to each other.

The Government of Nepal has not recognized library and information system as an important area to fulfill the norms of Right to information. Due consideration has not been given to great congenial and favorable atmosphere to avail all sorts of information of public importance as a matter of right through a scientifically developed and designed library and information system. With the lacking of government interest to develop this sector the existing libraries and information centers are handicapped by economic crisis and legal protection and their services are not targeted to fulfill the right to information.

The Role of other Sectors to fulfill Right to Information

Mass media have played significant role for current information flow in Nepal. Telecommunication has no doubt revolutionized information communication services through telephone, satellites, e-mail, internet etc. As far as global information access and transfer to fulfill the right to information, are concerned Nepalese are no longer separated by oceans, mountains and deserts. Today every Nepalese can directly dial almost everywhere in the world. Voice and visual communications through computer, radio, television and telephone are possible. Journalists, press and publishers, postal services etc have contributed a lot to disseminate the information generated by scientists, politicians, social scientists, government agencies, NGOs, INGOs etc to the required information seekers. But the identical one way message or information through voice and visual

² Nepal. Ministry of Law and Justice. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 8th reprint, 2053B.S(1998) in Nepali.

methods except print media, to a large numbers of physically separated masses cannot be an effective means to gather the wealth of information to fulfill the right to information. The important areas of information communications such as radio, television, telecommunication, press and publisher etc have recognized by government through acts, rules and regulations. But library and information system, having great importance for information generation to utilization as a matter of information right has not been recognized through acts, rules and regulation by the government.

Effort for Legal Protection of Right to Information and Library system

The charter of the United Nations signed in June 26, 1945 has recognized the modern human right law. The Articles 55 and 62 of the charter pledge member states and United Nations itself to promote “Universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedom.”³ Universal declaration of Human Rights under its Article 19 states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, review and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontier”. With this declaration right to information is treated as fundamental right of the human beings all over the world. Nepal, as a member of state of the UN, has tried to protect the right to information as a fundamental right. The Article 16 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 2047 has guaranteed this right. A Bill of right to information, 2003 was proposed for Nepal to be passed by the Parliament. Due to different reasons it has not been passed as not get the states of Right to information Act so far. As per the nature of the proposed Bill the right to information means an access to government information. The information generated by private sectors is not considered. Not only the government information but also other private sector information, which directly or indirectly affect life, liberty and property of the citizens should be incorporated in the proposed law so that people’s right to know will be minimized.

As in our country Right to information has been incorporated in the constitutions and laws of several other countries. More than forty countries now have laws that require the disclosure of government records and about a dozen more are considering enacting of separate status regarding the right to information.⁴

Library and information systems are considered as pilots and life-boats of the new information age. Actually they are providing mainly three types of information requirement of users, whether Right to information Act is enacted or not. Those are factual data, document of a particular author or with a particular title and documents dealing with a particular subject. The factual data and documents are available in varieties of forms and formats such as audio resources, visual resources, print media and electronic materials. The information available in varieties of forms and formats may be of government information, NGO information, INGO information or private information. The aim of well managed library is to fulfill the desire of users as matter of right without act.

³ UN. The United Nations and Human Rights, 1945-1995, New York, 1995

⁴ Dr Ramkrishna Timilsena-Right to information: Philosophy , Laws and Practice, Bijaya Timilsena, 2003

Conclusion

With the above discussion it can be said that library and information systems should be a part and parcel of Right to information act. Libraries and information centers should work as the laboratories to fulfill every type of information need of the citizens. The government of Nepal will certainly, recognize the importance of libraries and information centers to achieve the goals of Right to Information in the present changing atmosphere. The proposed bill drafted by the earlier government should be revised. The ideas of the experts of different sectors should be incorporated in the Bill of Right to Information. Library and information profession should get certain responsibilities through legal provision.

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