

Chapter 7

Digital Initiatives of the Indian Council of World Affairs' Library

Chhaya Sharma
American Center, India

ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to unravel the journey of Sapru House library (Indian Council of World Library) from a passive manual traditional library to an active electronic library. This chapter provides insights into the traditional management of the resources and their service provision and examines the reasons for the digital initiatives and the how the challenges and obstructions were met and overridden. ICWA library is an academic library having a unique and matchless collection of bound newspapers (since 1933), press clippings (since 1964) and rare books (between 1700-1900) constitute 70% of its total collection. Housing, storage, management, preservation, conservation, retrieval and dissemination were underlying reasons that inspired the author to transform this valued collection to a digital repository of knowledge. This chapter gives a detailed account of the conception of the digital initiations vis-à-vis the digital project, outlines, reports, discussions, presentations, approvals, sanctions, funding, execution, implementation and the outcome and realization of the dream.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), an institution that has steeped in glorious history and past, 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 this country. 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 a 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 Kumar 1973).

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Eminent personalities, key government officials from all over the world visited and guided the development of Sapru House. There are testimonies of some of the important events like the Asian Relations Conference organized in 1947, addressed by our Father of Nation, 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 Kumar 1973).

Sapru House Library

Libraries have always been instrumental in opening new vistas of knowledge & understanding to their readers. There are a number of libraries in the vicinity of Sapru House library but no such library is 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 entered in 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 pride of this Library has been the special collections covering a host of subjects such as international relations, world affairs, foreign policy, political history and economics. It has a rich resource 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, in sync with today and is available just at the click of the mouse button is what attracts a researcher to browse a library. Automation & 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.

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