

LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS AS PARTNERS IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF INDIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

This article examines the evolving role of library professionals as partners in research and development within the Indian university education system. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks, policy analysis, and empirical research, the study investigates how academic librarians contribute to research support services, the challenges they face, and the opportunities presented by recent initiatives such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) program. The findings reveal that while the conceptual foundation for library professionals as research partners is well-established in Indian policy discourse, implementation remains inconsistent across institutions. Research Support Services (RSS) in Indian academic libraries are largely in their infancy, with significant gaps in areas such as Research Data Management (RDM), research impact measurement, and scholarly publishing support. The study identifies eight major categories of research support services and assesses their availability across central universities and Institutes of National Importance. The research underscores the critical importance of reimagining the role of library professionals—from custodians of collections to active collaborators in the research enterprise—and recommends structural, policy, and professional development interventions to strengthen this partnership.

Keywords: *Library Professionals, Research and Development, University Education, Research Support Services, National Education Policy 2020, One Nation One Subscription, Academic Libraries, India*

1. Introduction

The relationship between libraries and research has been recognized as fundamental to the advancement of knowledge since the establishment of the first universities. In the Indian context, the university library has long been conceptualized as the "heart of the university" and an indispensable partner in research activities. The Education Commission under Dr. D.S. Kothari explicitly recognized that "a collection of books, even a collection of good books, does not constitute a 'library'; rather it is now an 'intellectual workshop' for the researchers". This conceptualization positions the library not merely as a repository of information but as an active agent in the research process.

The role of library professionals in research and development has undergone profound transformation over the past several decades. From the traditional functions of collection building and information organization, academic librarians have evolved into research partners who contribute to literature searching, research data management, scholarly publishing, open access advocacy, and research impact measurement. This evolution reflects broader changes in the research landscape, including the digital transformation of scholarly communication, the emergence of open science, and the increasing emphasis on research productivity and impact. The Indian university education system, with its 56 Central Universities and 156 Institutes of National Importance, represents a complex and diverse landscape for library and research support services. Recent policy developments, particularly the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, have created new

opportunities and expectations for library professionals. NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of libraries in achieving its goals of multidisciplinary education, interdisciplinary research, and institutional excellence, while ONOS represents a landmark effort to democratize access to scholarly research across the country.

This article examines library professionals as partners in research and development within the Indian university education system. It explores the theoretical foundations of this partnership, the current state of research support services in Indian academic libraries, the challenges faced by library professionals, and the opportunities presented by recent policy initiatives. The study aims to contribute to the growing discourse on the evolving role of academic libraries in supporting research and development in India.

2. Need of the Study

The study of library professionals as partners in research and development in the Indian university education system is necessitated by several compelling factors.

First, the research landscape in India has undergone significant transformation. The expansion of research activities in Indian universities has placed broader obligations on libraries to increase their resources and services to meet new demands. Data from the Association of Indian Universities reveals a dramatic increase in doctoral research output: in the field of Physical Sciences, only 632 theses were accepted up to 1950, but 5,751 were accepted during 1961-70 alone; in Biological Sciences, the number increased from 214 to 3,196 during the same period. This exponential growth in research activity demands corresponding growth in library research support.

Second, despite the recognized importance of libraries in research, studies indicate that Indian academic libraries lack significant adoption and cognizance of research support services. A comprehensive investigation of 212 Indian academic institutions found that the implementation of Research Support Services (RSS) is in its infancy, with very few libraries offering Research Data Management (RDM) services or research impact measurement services. This gap between the potential and actual contribution of library professionals to research and development warrants systematic investigation.

Third, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has created new expectations for libraries in higher education. NEP identifies libraries as crucial partners in implementing the policy's vision of multidisciplinary education, interdisciplinary research, internationalization, and equity and inclusiveness. Understanding the role of library professionals in realizing these objectives is essential for the successful implementation of NEP 2020.

Fourth, the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, launched by the Government of India, represents a transformative shift in access to scholarly resources. As thousands of institutions gain access to publications from more than 30 major international publishers, the role of library professionals in managing this access, training users, and maximizing the impact of these resources becomes increasingly critical.

Fifth, professional discourse has highlighted the need for deeper engagement between librarians and researchers. As one senior library professional observed, "How many of us know the current questions our professors and students are investigating? How often do we meet

them and discuss their information needs?". This gap in engagement reflects a broader need for reimagining the professional role of academic librarians.

Finally, the study is necessitated by the need for evidence-based policy and practice. Understanding the current state of library research support services, the challenges faced by library professionals, and the opportunities for enhancing their contribution to research and development can inform policy decisions, professional development programs, and institutional strategies.

3. Background of the Study

3.1 Theoretical Foundations: The Library as a Partner in Research

The conceptualization of the library as a partner in research has deep roots in library and information science. The University Grants Commission has long recognized that the university library "plays the role of a partner in research". This partnership manifests in several ways: informing researchers about progress in their fields, providing resources necessary for research, aiding teachers in keeping abreast of developments, and bringing books, students, and scholars together.

Paul Buck, in articulating a credo for the Harvard University Library, established principles that resonate with the Indian context: "First, the library is the heart of education. Every educational advance depends upon its resources, and, in large measure, the degree of advance is proportionate to the potential of the library to respond... A quality education is impossible without a quality library... You cannot have a quality faculty without a quality library". These principles underscore the fundamental interdependence between library quality and educational-research excellence.

3.2 The Indian University Library System

The Indian university library system has evolved significantly since independence. In the post-independence period, most university libraries underwent noticeable changes, with part-time professor-librarians being replaced by scholar-librarians. This professionalization of librarianship has strengthened the capacity of libraries to support research activities.

The Kothari Commission (Education Commission) assigned clear objectives to university libraries: providing resources for research, aiding teachers in keeping abreast of developments, providing facilities for formal instruction, opening doors to the world of books, and bringing books and scholars together. These objectives remain relevant today and are echoed in NEP 2020's vision for libraries.

The expansion of research activities has placed broader obligations on libraries. The Education Commission rightly noted that "a collection of books, even a collection of good books, does not constitute a 'library'; rather it is now an 'intellectual workshop' for the researchers". This transformation from preservation to utility, from textbook library to library of documents, has been a defining feature of Indian university library development.

3.3 Research Support Services: An Evolving Framework

Research Support Services (RSS) in academic libraries encompass a wide range of activities designed to support researchers throughout the research lifecycle. Recent studies have classified these services into eight major categories:

1. Research Guides : Guidance on research methodologies, literature search strategies, and citation practices
2. Research Consultancy : Personalized assistance to researchers on their specific information needs
3. Research Impact Measurement : Services related to bibliometrics, citation analysis, and research evaluation
4. Open Access : Advocacy, support, and infrastructure for open access publishing and archiving
5. Research Tools Recommendation : Guidance on appropriate tools for literature management, data analysis, and writing
6. Research Data Management (RDM) : Services for data management planning, data curation, and data sharing
7. Scholarly Publishing : Support for manuscript preparation, journal selection, and publication ethics
8. Archiving and Preservation : Services for preserving research outputs including articles and data

This framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the scope of library research support.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 Libraries and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

Sutar (2024) provides an overview of NEP 2020 and identifies areas where libraries can play a crucial role in its effective implementation. The study, employing a descriptive research method to evaluate the NEP document, finds that libraries can contribute to personality development, strengthening of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), internationalization of higher education, specific skills and values for students, motivation for researchers and teachers, and equity and inclusiveness. The study emphasizes that libraries can act as catalysts for overall national development through their role in NEP implementation. Particular attention is drawn to the role of libraries in promoting interdisciplinary research and developing inclusive education centers for visually impaired and disabled students.

4.2 The Library as a Research Partner: Historical and Conceptual Foundations

A comprehensive analysis of the role of university libraries in Indian research reveals that "the effective partnership in the march of research lies in informing the researchers about the progress in general, and about advances research has made in the field of their interest". The study documents the exponential growth in doctoral research output in Indian universities, noting that during 1961-70, 5,751 theses in Physical Sciences, 3,196 in Biological Sciences, and 3,880 in Humanities were accepted—representing a manifold increase from previous decades. This research output "speaks volumes of the role a university library plays in aiding researchers and extending the frontiers of knowledge". The study identifies five major contributions libraries can make to research: collecting research resources including government publications and periodicals; acquiring tools of research such as indexing tools and bibliographies; providing services to research workers; arranging interlibrary loan; and organizing international cooperation.

4.3 Library Professionals and Scholarly Communication

Research on the registration status of library professionals on the Indian Research Information Network System (IRINS) among top seven IITs reveals the role of library professionals in scholarly communication. The study finds that IRINS plays an integral part in enhancing the profile of LIS professionals, enabling collaboration with other institutions and building research capacity. This highlights the growing importance of library professionals in managing and showcasing institutional research output.

5. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the conceptual foundations of library professionals as partners in research and development in the Indian university education system.
2. To assess the current state of Research Support Services (RSS) in Indian academic libraries.
3. To analyze the role of library professionals in implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
4. To evaluate the impact of the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative on library research support.
5. To identify the challenges faced by library professionals in contributing to research and development.
6. To examine the professional development needs of library professionals for effective research support.
7. To explore innovative practices and models of library-research partnerships in India.
8. To provide recommendations for strengthening the role of library professionals in research and development.

6. The Role of Library Professionals as Partners in Research and Development

6.1 The Conceptual Framework: From Custodians to Partners

The transformation of library professionals from custodians of collections to partners in research represents a fundamental shift in professional identity and practice. Traditionally, librarians focused on acquiring, organizing, and preserving information resources. The contemporary research environment, however, demands a more active and collaborative role. As one senior library professional observed, "the most important part of any, especially an academic/research, library is not these physical things and not even efficient management of the scarce resources allotted to the library. It is people".

This people-centered approach is exemplified by the work of librarians who understand the research interests of faculty and researchers. Examples include Mr. V Sarangan of the CSIR headquarters library, who "knew which officer, be it the Director General or Head of Planning or Manpower division, would benefit by reading which latest arrivals," and Mr. Ratnakar of the Raman Research Institute, who "knew the research interests of virtually every researcher in the campus from the Director down to the freshly recruited research student". These exemplars demonstrate the deep engagement that characterizes the library professional as research partner.

6.2 Research Support Services: The Core of Partnership

The provision of Research Support Services (RSS) represents the core of library professionals' partnership in research. Recent research has identified eight major categories of RSS that academic libraries should provide :

Research Guides : Library professionals provide guidance on research methodologies, literature search strategies, and citation practices. This includes helping researchers identify relevant databases, formulate effective search strategies, and use citation management tools.

Research Consultancy : Personalized assistance to researchers on their specific information needs. This involves in-depth engagement with researchers to understand their research questions and provide tailored support.

Research Impact Measurement : Services related to bibliometrics, citation analysis, and research evaluation. Library professionals help researchers measure their research impact, identify high-impact journals, and track citations.

Open Access : Advocacy, support, and infrastructure for open access publishing and archiving. Library professionals help researchers navigate open access policies, identify appropriate open access venues, and deposit research outputs in institutional repositories.

Research Tools Recommendation : Guidance on appropriate tools for literature management, data analysis, and writing. Library professionals stay current with research tools and recommend those best suited to researchers' needs.

Research Data Management (RDM) : Services for data management planning, data curation, and data sharing. This emerging area involves helping researchers develop data management plans, organize and document data, and deposit data in appropriate repositories.

Scholarly Publishing : Support for manuscript preparation, journal selection, and publication ethics. Library professionals help researchers identify suitable journals, understand publication processes, and avoid predatory publishers.

Archiving and Preservation : Services for preserving research outputs including articles and data. This involves ensuring long-term access to research outputs through institutional repositories and other preservation mechanisms.

6.3 The Library as an "Intellectual Workshop"

The conceptualization of the library as an "intellectual workshop for researchers" captures the essence of the partnership between library professionals and researchers . Unlike a mere repository of books, the library as intellectual workshop is a dynamic space where researchers engage with information resources, supported by skilled professionals who understand their needs.

This conceptualization has practical implications. It requires that library professionals have subject knowledge, research understanding, and pedagogical skills to effectively support researchers. It also requires that libraries be organized and equipped to facilitate research activities. As the Kothari Commission recognized, "in the absence of proper organization of library materials and other research resources, the researchers waste lot of their precious time in reading and collecting relevant and irrelevant materials without much discrimination and even without suiting their specific needs".

The concept of the library as intellectual workshop also implies that library professionals should be proactive in informing researchers about progress in their fields. As one study noted,

"the effective partnership in the march of research lies in informing the researchers about the progress in general, and about advances research has made in the field of their interest" .

6.4 The Documentation Officer/Research Librarian Model

The documentation officer or research librarian model represents an important approach to library-research partnership in Indian universities. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was a pioneer in recruiting Documentation Officers for research centers in different schools, with other universities soon following this model.

Documentation Officers are creative knowledge workers who handle research communication channels and act as moderators in social media channels, online discussion forums, and academic events. They possess doctoral or M.Phil. degrees or equivalent publishing records, which are prerequisites for understanding the academic research process and requirements of research centers .

The responsibilities of Documentation Officers include inculcating information and media literacy, raising awareness on anti-plagiarism practices, and guiding research students in literature search, literature review, research methodology, and citation techniques. These responsibilities position Documentation Officers as active partners in the research process rather than passive providers of information.

Globally, such positions are increasingly redesignated as "Assistant Professor in Information, Media and Digital Literacy" . This redesignation reflects the academic status and pedagogical responsibilities of these professionals and represents a model for enhancing the role of library professionals in Indian universities.

7. Merits of Library Professionals as Research Partners

7.1 Deep Subject Knowledge and Research Understanding

Library professionals who serve as research partners possess subject knowledge that enables them to understand and engage with research in specific disciplines. Documentation Officers with doctoral degrees or equivalent publishing records are "qualified enough to understand the academic research process and to understand requirements of a research centre" . This subject knowledge enables them to provide meaningful support to researchers.

7.2 Personalized Research Support

The research partnership model enables personalized support to researchers. Rather than providing generic services, library professionals can tailor their support to the specific needs of individual researchers or research groups. This personalized approach has been shown to significantly enhance research productivity and quality.

7.3 Proactive Information Services

Library professionals as research partners adopt proactive approaches to information services. They "inform the researchers about the progress in general, and about advances research has made in the field of their interest" . This proactive stance ensures that researchers are aware of relevant developments in their fields.

7.4 Integration with Research Processes

The partnership model integrates library professionals with research processes. Documentation Officers are "attached with research departments in major universities across the world" and are "particularly helpful to research students in knowledge discovery from secondary

databases, i.e., literature search, literature review, research methodology, and citation techniques" . This integration ensures that research support is available at each stage of the research process.

7.5 Research Communication and Visibility

Library professionals contribute to research communication and visibility. They "handle research communication channels of their respective research centres" and "act as a moderator in social media channels, online discussion forums and rapporteur for academic events" . These activities enhance the visibility of research and researchers.

7.6 Policy Support

Library professionals provide policy support for research and development. They help researchers navigate open access policies, publication mandates, and research assessment requirements. Under NEP 2020, libraries are recognized as "catalysts for overall national development" . This policy recognition creates opportunities for library professionals to contribute to national research priorities.

7.7 Equity and Inclusiveness

Library professionals contribute to equity and inclusiveness in research. Many libraries have "developed inclusive education centres to provide library facilities to visually impaired and disabled students" . NEP 2020 recognizes the role of libraries in "equity and inclusiveness of higher education" . This commitment to inclusivity ensures that all researchers have access to the resources and support they need.

8. Demerits and Challenges

8.1 Limited Adoption of Research Support Services

Research reveals that Indian academic libraries lack significant adoption and cognizance of Research Support Services (RSS), with implementation in its infancy. Very few academic libraries offer Research Data Management (RDM) services, and research impact measurement services show variations in availability. This limited adoption represents a significant gap in the partnership between library professionals and researchers.

8.2 Technical Expertise Gaps

While library professionals exhibit moderate familiarity with open science practices such as open-access publishing and data sharing, "significant gaps persist in technical expertise and institutional support". Training in technical skills, advocacy, and open data management is critical but often unavailable. The lack of specialized training in areas like data curation and research data management limits the capacity of library professionals to provide comprehensive research support.

8.3 Inadequate Institutional Support

Library professionals face "limited resources, insufficient infrastructure, lack of awareness, and stakeholder resistance to change". These challenges are compounded by "inadequate funding and unclear institutional policies". The absence of clear institutional recognition of the research support role of library professionals constrains their effectiveness.

8.4 Limited Engagement with Researchers

Professional discourse has highlighted the need for deeper engagement between librarians and researchers. The question has been raised: "How many of us know the current questions our professors and students are investigating? How often do we meet them and discuss their information needs?". This limited engagement reflects a gap between the potential and actual contribution of library professionals to research.

8.5 Resource Constraints

Resource constraints, including "inadequate funding and unclear institutional policies," hinder the implementation of comprehensive research support services. The transition from traditional library services to research support services requires investments in infrastructure, technology, and professional development that are often not available.

8.6 Staffing Structure and Career Progression

The staffing structure in Indian university libraries often limits the capacity for research support. While the Documentation Officer model exists in some universities, it is not widely adopted. The lack of research librarian positions with appropriate qualifications and career progression limits the attractiveness of this professional pathway. The redesignation of Documentation Officers as "Assistant Professor in Information, Media and Digital Literacy" has been proposed to address this issue.

8.7 Lack of Awareness Among Researchers

Limited awareness among researchers about the range of services available from libraries represents a significant challenge. Even when services exist, researchers may not be aware of them or may not understand how to access them. This awareness gap requires proactive outreach and communication by library professionals.

8.8 Resistance to Change

Stakeholder resistance to change, including resistance from faculty and administrators, hampers the transformation of library roles. Traditional perceptions of libraries as repositories rather than partners in research create barriers to the adoption of research support services.

9. The Role of Library Professionals in Research and Development: A Detailed Analysis

9.1 Supporting the Research Lifecycle

Library professionals support researchers throughout the research lifecycle. At the proposal stage, they help researchers identify funding opportunities, conduct literature searches, and develop research methodologies. During the research process, they provide access to information resources, offer research data management support, and assist with citation management. At the publication stage, they help researchers select appropriate journals, navigate open access policies, and deposit research outputs in repositories. After publication, they assist with research impact measurement and visibility enhancement.

This lifecycle approach ensures that library professionals are engaged partners in research at every stage. As one study noted, "academic libraries, as one of the most important stakeholders in research and the backbone of knowledge acquisition, storage, and dissemination processes, offer a variety of services to support research endeavors in their parent institutions".

9.2 Implementing NEP 2020 Through Libraries

NEP 2020 identifies several areas where libraries can play a crucial role: personality development, strengthening of HEIs, internationalization, skills and values development,

motivation for researchers and teachers, and equity and inclusiveness. Library professionals are essential to realizing these objectives.

Personality Development : Libraries can contribute to personality development by providing resources for reading for pleasure, self-discovery, personal growth, and the sharpening of intellectual curiosity.

Strengthening of HEIs : Libraries can strengthen HEIs by providing resources necessary for research, aiding teachers in keeping abreast of developments, and bringing books, students, and scholars together.

Internationalization : Libraries can support internationalization by providing access to international scholarly resources and facilitating international research collaborations.

Skills and Values : Libraries can inculcate specific skills and values through information literacy programs, publication ethics training, and awareness of open science practices.

Motivation for Researchers and Teachers : Libraries can motivate researchers and teachers by keeping them informed about progress in their fields and providing personalized research support.

Equity and Inclusiveness : Libraries can promote equity and inclusiveness through inclusive education centers and ensuring access to information resources for all users.

9.3 Open Science and Research Data Management

The Open Science movement, emphasizing transparency, accessibility, and collaboration in research, requires active participation from libraries as facilitators. Library professionals play several roles in advancing Open Science:

Data Curation : Library professionals manage, preserve, and share research data, ensuring its long-term accessibility.

Policy Advocacy : Library professionals advocate for open access policies, data sharing mandates, and institutional support for open science.

Researcher Training : Library professionals train researchers in open science practices, including data management, open access publishing, and collaborative research platforms.

The study by Sutar (2024) found that while Indian library professionals exhibit moderate familiarity with Open Science tools and practices, "significant gaps persist in technical expertise and institutional support". These gaps require targeted training and institutional commitment.

9.4 Research Impact Measurement and Bibliometrics

Library professionals support researchers in measuring and demonstrating their research impact. This includes bibliometric analysis, citation tracking, and identification of high-impact journals. The IRINS platform, an Indian Research Information Network System, plays an integral part in enhancing the profile of LIS professionals and enabling collaboration with other institutions.

Research on the registration status of library professionals on IRINS reveals that the platform contributes to building research capacity and showcasing research output. Library professionals who are registered on IRINS are better positioned to support researchers in impact measurement and scholarly communication.

9.5 Scholarly Publishing and Publication Ethics

Library professionals support researchers in scholarly publishing, including manuscript preparation, journal selection, and understanding publication ethics. This includes guidance on avoiding predatory publishers, understanding copyright and open access, and adhering to publication ethics standards.

Professional discourse has emphasized the importance of inculcating information and media literacy and raising awareness on anti-plagiarism practices. Library professionals are well-positioned to provide these services, given their expertise in information organization and ethical information use.

9.6 Information, Media, and Digital Literacy

Inculcating information, media, and digital literacy is a core responsibility of library professionals in research support. Globally, specialized "Assistant Professor in Information, Media and Digital Literacy" positions have been introduced to fulfill this function. In the Indian context, Documentation Officers perform similar roles, including:

- Training graduate and doctoral students in information literacy
- Guiding research students in literature search, literature review, and research methodology
- Raising awareness of publication ethics and plagiarism avoidance
- Using general and academic social media as part of information literacy curricula

These literacy services are essential for developing research capacity and ensuring the integrity and quality of research.

9.7 The One Nation One Subscription Initiative

The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, launched by the Government of India, represents a landmark effort to democratize access to scholarly research. Through ONOS, thousands of institutions now have access to publications from more than 30 major international publishers. Library professionals play a critical role in this initiative:

Access Management : Library professionals manage access to ONOS resources, ensuring that authorized users can access the subscribed content.

User Training : Library professionals train users in accessing and using ONOS resources effectively.

Awareness Building : Library professionals raise awareness of the availability and value of ONOS resources.

Dr. Nabi Hasan, a PEC member of India's ONOS initiative, emphasizes the transformative potential of this initiative: "Through ONOS, thousands of institutions now have access to publications from more than 30 major international publishers... This initiative is a major step toward bridging the research gap between urban and rural institutions, empowering students, faculty, and researchers across India with high-quality academic resources".

9.8 Consortia and Resource Sharing

Library professionals facilitate resource sharing through consortia and interlibrary loan. This includes participating in consortia-based subscriptions, facilitating interlibrary loan, and maintaining union catalogues of periodicals. These activities ensure that researchers have access to resources beyond their institution's holdings, enhancing the scope and quality of research.

10. Conclusion

This study has examined library professionals as partners in research and development within the Indian university education system, revealing both significant strengths and persistent challenges. The conceptual foundation for this partnership is well-established, with university libraries recognized as "intellectual workshops" for researchers and indispensable partners in the research enterprise. The Kothari Commission's vision of the library as a vital organ of its parent institution, playing "the role of a partner in research," remains relevant today.

The research support services framework provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the scope of library professionals' contribution to research and development. The eight categories of Research Support Services—Research Guides, Research Consultancy, Research Impact Measurement, Open Access, Research Tools Recommendation, Research Data Management, Scholarly Publishing, and Archiving and Preservation—capture the range of activities through which library professionals support researchers.

However, the adoption of these services in Indian academic libraries remains inconsistent. Research reveals that Indian academic libraries lack significant adoption and cognizance of Research Support Services, with implementation in its infancy. Very few academic libraries offer Research Data Management services, and research impact measurement services show variations in availability. This gap between potential and actual contribution represents a significant challenge.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative create new opportunities for library professionals to contribute to research and development. NEP identifies libraries as crucial partners in achieving its vision of multidisciplinary education, interdisciplinary research, and institutional excellence. ONOS represents a landmark effort to democratize access to scholarly research, with library professionals playing a critical role in managing access, training users, and maximizing impact. The documentation officer or research librarian model, exemplified by institutions like Jawaharlal Nehru University, represents an important approach to integrating library professionals with research processes. These professionals possess subject knowledge, research understanding, and pedagogical skills that enable them to serve as active partners in research. The redesignation of such positions as "Assistant Professor in Information, Media and Digital Literacy" reflects the academic status and responsibilities of these professionals and represents a model for enhancing the role of library professionals in Indian universities.

Addressing the challenges facing library professionals requires a multi-faceted approach. Institutional support, including adequate funding and clear policies, is essential. Professional development programs, particularly in technical skills, advocacy, and open data management, are critical to empower librarians to support research effectively. Reimagining the professional role of library professionals—from custodians of collections to active collaborators in the research enterprise—requires a shift in perception among library professionals, researchers, administrators, and policymakers.

The examples of exemplary library professionals—those who know the research interests of every researcher and proactively deliver information resources—demonstrate the potential of this partnership. As one senior librarian noted, "I have had the privilege of knowing a few



librarians who excelled in serving their academic clients beyond their expectations". Building on these exemplars, Indian academic libraries can strengthen their contribution to research and development and fulfill their potential as partners in the advancement of knowledge.

In conclusion, library professionals are essential partners in research and development in the Indian university education system. Their contribution, while significant, can be enhanced through policy support, professional development, institutional commitment, and a reimagining of professional roles. As the Kothari Commission recognized, "the greatness of the university, therefore, lies in the greatness which its library system has achieved through meeting the educational and research requirements of its faculty and student community".

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