2.40 Digital library content in South Asia

Piyadasa Ranasinghe

Department of Library and Information Science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

ABSTRACT

In any library, whether it is paper or digital, the core of the services is its content. Digital library is nothing more than a blend of computer and communication technology to deliver the contents of a library to end users surpassing the boundaries of space and time. Out of the six concepts of the digital library, viz. content, user, functionality, quality, policy and architecture (DELOS Manifesto), the content aspect comes first. When compared to traditional paper libraries, still the digital libraries are in their infancy. Most of the digital libraries, except a handful originated in developed countries, do not have adequate contents.

The present research concentrates on the digital library content in Sri Lanka. The method employed was to examine the existing South Asian digital virtual libraries in the net. A closer look at the digital libraries that originated in South Asian countries, reveals that their contents are limited only to data and information. Still the knowledge has not become the main component of their content. The content of these libraries generally consists of (i) data (unprocessed information), (ii) information on various topics, (iii) bibliographical surrogates such as library catalogues, indexes and bibliographies and (iv) a bare minimum of full text articles and e-books. In these libraries, apart from data and information, knowledge has not received its full fledged status as it should be. The rich cultural heritage of these countries has produced a treasure of knowledge over the centuries in numerous national languages. End users of digital libraries of these countries will naturally expect to obtain copies of documents of this knowledge to their desktops. Data and information, including bibliographical information will be of little use when no digital copies of the documents that contain knowledge are available.

It is true that certain countries in the region have taken commendable efforts to develop digital libraries. However, in most cases the knowledge content of these libraries is limited to few scanned copies of books and other documents in national languages. As no indexing of the content of such documents has been done, their value is very little. This situation can be observed in all countries of the region. Hence, the effective digital libraries with adequate contents are yet to be developed in South Asia. Problems in digitalization of vernacular languages, lack of funds for digitalization projects, insufficient IT professionals to man such projects, problems of bandwidth for information delivery, poor computer literacy of people, less priority for digital libraries among other burning issues in these countries are some of the reasons for this situation.

Key words: Digital library Digital content, Virtual library, Library and information science,South Asia.