12. Academic Libraries in India amidst Covid-19 Pandemic: Influences and Strategies for Reopening

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Abstract:

Covid-19 pandemic came in the world with a great threat to disturb the human life during the whole year of 2020. It was emerged in China and from China it was spread to the whole world. In India, its outbreak occurred in March, 2020. For breaking the chain of Corona virus, a complete lockdown was imposed by the Union Government of India on March 22, 2020. The lockdown in India was imposed in four phases including with proper guidelines were given for red, orange and green zone. Various sectors like travel, business, agriculture, industries, educational institutions etc remained closed during lockdown. The academic libraries were also compelled to close. Due to closure of libraries, study of the students has got affected during Covid-19 pandemic. After the ending of fourth phase of Lockdown, the Unlock phases get started. During lockdown and unlock, it was challenge for the library professionals that how to resume the library services to satisfy their users and clients. In this chapter, the author emphasizes on the influences of Covid 19 pandemic on academic libraries, the consequences of lockdown and Unlock phase from time to time. The author also suggests the special measures and strategies that should be adopted by every academic institutions for reopening of their academic libraries that emerged as a challenge for the library staff that how to protect the users, clients and the library resources from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, academic libraries, Lockdown, Unlock, Challenge. Measures and Strategies

12.1 Introduction:

The outbreak of Corona virus was first seen in China in late December, 2019. After that its outbreak had occurred in the other countries. It is a Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). World Health Organization (WHO) has defined Covid as Corona Virus for Disease. On seeing the increasing rates of this infection, WHO (World Health Organization) has declared the health emergency. [1] On March 24, 2020, total shut down i.e. lockdown was imposed by the Union Government of India.

Everyone is affected by lockdown due to Covid 19 pandemic. Health, Education, Business, Agriculture, Airlines, Travel, industries and departments of government and non- government including libraries and museums etc. got affected as a result of this pandemic. Every walk of life and profession has undergone distortion and adjustment. Government authorities in India have implemented several safety measures for the public to prevent the spread of Corona virus.

Darcy Brixey, a library manager says "Libraries are one of the few places where anybody supposes to go without the willing of having to buy something." [2] Due to Covid -19, the academic institutions remained closed. As we know the libraries lie in the heart of every institution, so, libraries were also remained close during the whole lockdown imposition in India. It became difficult for the library users to use the library services and access the library resources. The lockdown imposition emerged as a challenging environment for the libraries and their professionals to combat with Covid-19 pandemic.

Libraries went beyond four walls. Only one major solution for the libraries was to provide online services to the clients. Since libraries are non-profit organizations. It was the duty of the library authorities to focus on the safety regarding health of the staff, students, users and clients of the libraries. Keeping in mind towards the safety of the library staff too, work from home was the suitable option for the institutions to provide library services to the users in need. Access to library resources provided off-campus by the library staff. [3] Accessing resources online, reading and learning virtually were the outcomes that were emerged as a solution for the study during the Covid-19 pandemic. Digital environment is playing very important role for the students and academic researchers. It supports teaching, reading and learning. Before the Lockdown, the libraries have different rules and regulations. But during Covid-19 pandemic, the scenario of the libraries got changed. So, after the uplifting of the lockdown and Unlock, the academic libraries has to make special measures for their proper working with keeping things in mind regarding the health of staffs and the patrons.

12.2 Objectives:

This book chapter focused on the following objectives:

a. To highlight various phases of Lockdown and Unlock.
b. To enlist the influences of Lockdown on academic libraries amidst Covid-19 pandemic.
c. To enlist the influences of Unlock on academic libraries.
d. To suggest the various measures and strategies for the reopening of libraries.

12.3 Lockdown and Unlock During Covid-19 in India:

For breaking the chain of Covid-19 pandemic, it was the period when no one was allowed to leave the home, total curfew imposed, banned on travelling, shops, cafes, gym, industries, educational institutions etc were closed. Various restrictions were imposed by Home Ministry. Social distancing was maintained and masks became compulsory to wear.

In India, nationwide lockdown was imposed by GOI (Government of India) on March 24, 2020 as a preventive measure. [4] The lockdown imposition led into four phases. Various state governments and central government recommended to extend the lockdown imposition as the Covid-19 cases were increasing day by day even after the end of first lockdown.[5] On seeing the spread of Corona virus region wise, Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to extend the nationwide lockdown till May 3, 2020 with few relaxations.

That was phase 2 of lockdown in India that has been announced from April 15 to May 3, 2020. [6] The areas were classified into three zones: (a) Red zone, (b) Orange zone and (c) Green zone.

The red zone indicated as the dangerous zone with finding positive cases of Covid-19 and highly infectious hotspot. In this hotspot, total curfew like conditions was recommended. The Orange zone indicated as some infection and the Green zone with zero positive cases that area was free from infection.[7]

To allow inter-state movement of the stranded people, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued guidelines like screening and quarantine them and after periodic checkup allow them their movement on April 29.[8] [9]

After the four phases of lockdown, the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) focused on economy. So, fresh guidelines for reopening were stated on June 1, 2020. That was termed as "Unlock 1.0". In containment zones, the lockdown was imposed totally. Unlock 2.0, Unlock 3.0, Unlock 4.0, Unlock 5.0 and Unlock 6.0 were the different phases of Unlock i.e. reopening of lockdown. But in containment zones, lockdown remained strictly in force till 30 November.

During Unlock 5.0, partial reopening of school was announced by MHA and state authorities in which the school staff is allowed to join the school but the students can go to school for taking the guidelines from teachers regarding their studies with the written consent of their parents. Unlock 7.0, 8.0 and 9.0 have been also announced for the month of December, January and February respectively.

12.4 Influences of Lockdown on Academic Libraries:

12.4.1 Totally Closure of Libraries:

Libraries are the sanctuaries of silence that are far away from the home of users but Impact of lockdown triggered has felt by library staff and the users. Most of libraries in India have closed temporarily due to lockdown imposition. [10] It seems as a manifestation situation for library users as library doors are shut for them. Academic libraries lie inside the building of institutions such as school library, college library and university library. Due to closure of academic institutions, these libraries remained closed too to follow the SOPs.

12.4.2 Libraries Go Beyond Four Walls

Today's libraries are not confined to four walls of a room. Electronic library, Hybrid library and Digital library play very important role during lockdown imposition. Reading occurs outside the walls of academic institutions every day. Reading and accessing of the study material or documents were promoted beyond four walls. [11]

12.4.3 Increased Access of Electronic Resources:

Many academic libraries started to provide the electronic resources like e- books, e-journals and e- periodicals etc to their users and clients.

For example, National Digital Library of India (NDLI) is free of cost to use. It provides study materials from primary to postgraduate. Various video lectures are also provided on the website. During Covid 19 pandemic, NDLI took step to provide the study material free of cost. [12]

12.4.4 Arrangement of Virtual Conferences, Webinars and Faculty Development Programmes:

For up skilling the library professionals, various institutions started to organize virtual conferences, webinars and faculty development programmes. It was great opportunity for the library professionals to come close to one another and transfer their new ideas and skills which are helpful in librarianship during Covid 19 pandemic and in the future too.

12.4.5 Increased Use of Electronic Gadgets:

The demand of electronic gadgets such as mobile phones, laptops, computer and tablets get increased for the study purpose and for attending the online classes and for obtaining the reading material online. The sale of such gadgets has increased during the lockdown.

12.5 Influences Over Academic Libraries During Unlock:

Now it is the challenging time for the library staff that how to re-channel their jobs and library services during Unlock period. The following points and main agendas should be taken by the library staff before the reopening of the library:

12.5.1 Health Concern of Staff and Patron:

The health concern of library staff and the patron should be considered on priority basis by the higher authorities of the educational institutions or the libraries. Special safety measures should be taken out for it. Proper guidelines should be traced or announced for running the libraries services. Ensure the mental health of the staff to cope with the stress of the pandemic. Any type of support they need must be provided.

12.5.2 Sanitization of Collections and Spaces:

The question arises how to sanitize all types of library collections and the spaces. The best answer for this is Quarantine of the library collection rather than using any type of disinfectant or radiations. No special training is required for the quarantine and it is not expansive too. There is no risk of damage of library collections. For sanitizing spaces, disinfectant can be used. [13] [14]

12.5.3 Social Distancing:

The SOPs given by the MHA and state authorities should be followed. Social distance is the preventive measure that should be considered during providing the library services to the clients.

12.5.4 Update and Up Skill Library Professionals:

It is great time for library professionals to update themselves, enhance their skills and coordinate with other staff all over the world. It is happened by attending various online conferences, seminars and faculty Development Programs.

There is no boundary to attend such events virtually. During Covid 19 pandemic, the traditional library remained closed. It was the time to access the digital library while sitting at your terminal around the world. So, it is the challenge for the library professionals to combat with the digital world and digital repositories.

12.5.5 Support for the Library Staff during the Pandemic

The library staff undergone various type of constraints such as stress, health, mentally, financially and socially. All type of support should be given to library professionals for upcoming time of reopening of libraries.

12.5.6 Strategies and Planning for Reopening of Libraries:

During Unlock 6.0, special measures and strategies are made by the higher authorities for reopening of academic libraries. The college and university libraries are opened for the students and the researchers during Unlock 6.0. But the school libraries are closed yet, as schools are not opened for the students. In the next sections, various measures and strategies for reopening of academic libraries are discussed.

12.6 Special Measures/Strategies for Reopening of Academic Libraries in India:

- **Temperature Record at the Entrance of Patron and Staff:** A responsible personnel for screening purpose should be placed at the entrance to check the temperature of the library staffs and the patrons. The personnel should be trained regarding thermometer handling, wearing masks, gloves and PPE kit and able to make decision for allowing the clients and staff to enter one by one with social distancing.
- **Installation of Sanitation Tunnel: likewise** the other government departments, Sanitation tunnel should be installed at the entry gate to sanitize all the persons. All the library staff and users and clients should be compelled to pass through the disinfectant chamber of the Sanitizer tunnel.
- **Hand Wash/ Liquid Soap:** Hand hygiene prevent the spread of infections. It is a simple effective way to prevent the spread of Corona Virus and its infection. [15] [16] [17] soap for washing hand should be provided.
- Use of Hand Sanitizer, mask and gloves- It should make mandatory to use hand sanitizer, mask and gloves for the library staffs and the users to prevent them from the Covid-19.
- **Queue Marks At 4-5 Feet Distance:** To minimize the physical interaction and maintain social distance, Queue marks should be made at four to five feet distance at entrance. It will help in reducing social interactions and the close contact.
- **Quarantine of Returned Books Before Re-Shelving/ New Arrivals for a Week before Shelving:** Using of any type of disinfectant for the library collection is harmful. So, it is mandatory to quarantine the returned books for a week before re-shelving them. But in this case next reader has to wait for that book. The new arrivals should also quarantine for a week to avoid the infection. After that they must be entered in library collections.
- **Fifty Percent Staff's Presence/ Roaster Duty:** To avoid crowd in the library, only 50 percent staff should be allowed to carry on their duties. Roaster duty should be employed during Covid 19 pandemic.

- **Cleaning of Reading Room Before and After Library Hours:** The reading room should be properly cleaned before and after library hours. If any positive person entered in the library then there is risk of infection will increased for the other ones.
- **Cleaning of Offices, Door Knobs, Counters, and Circulation Desk etc.:** The library offices, door knobs, counters and circulation desks should be cleaned and disinfected properly every day.
- **Reduce Student Study Space/ Social Distancing:** Number of users in the reading room and reading space should be decreased for maintain social distance.
- **Provide Scanning and Photocopying Service:** To avoid crowd in the library, better to provide scanning and photocopying services to the clients. The clients can use that material at their home for reading purpose.
- **Washroom at Every Storey:** There should be washroom at every storey of the library building so that the users can feel convenient and hygienic while availing the library services. Washroom should be fully hygienic.
- **Close the Library If Any Staff or Patron Is Infected:** If any person whether staff or user will find Covid positive then the library should be closed for at least a week.
- **Flexibility in Overdue:** No hard and fast rule is there mentioned for returning the books. Flexibility must be given to the users in the overdue reading material.

12.7 Conclusion:

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unusual changes in the way of working of academic library all over the India. During Lockdown, the paradigm of the academic libraries is totally shifted toward the digitalization. The students and academic researchers have started to depend on the e-contents that are available on the internet for their study and research purpose. Upto secondary level, DIKSHA, E-PATHSHALA, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) portal provide e- contents like e-books, audios, videos etc. for study purpose.

For higher education, E- PG Pathshala, Gyandhara, Swayam and Swayam Prabha are playing very important role for pursuing online study, reading and learning. [18] These platforms also provide online courses across the country. National Digital library of India (NDLI) is a project under Ministry of HRD (Human Resource Development), GOI (Government of India) that has a great repository of over 50 million e-books in all disciplines.

It provides free of cost access. It has emerged as a suitable remark in the challenging world during Covid 19 pandemic. [19] [20] [21] New guidelines and norms have to be made for the reopening of the libraries. With proper planning and following SOPs by the Home Ministry time to time, the library staff must have to welcome their patrons with full confidence in the changing scenario during Covid 19 pandemic. ArogyaSetu App can be downloaded by everyone to know the status of the health of the library staff and the patrons. It is a great initiative taken by the Government of India.

The whole India seems as Digital India where the student's from primary to higher standard started to access the e-resources instead of using libraries physically. Library professionals have to update themselves and upgrade their skills to work in the digital work. The role of the library professionals get totally changed into information disseminator, reference librarian, information provider and knowledge organizer.

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