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Indian Innovative Ways Are More Than Digitization: *Bhodhivanam*, the Library's Forest Environment

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Introduction

The lesson of G. K. Chesterton's famous article, *The Fallacy of Success* (www.chesterton-library.net/success.txt) can be taken to heart by librarians. Chesterton pokes fun at the many books that promise a formula for "success," by which they mean "material success," which he sees as no more than greed. Librarians are participating in this fallacy by bowing before the wealthy or mighty discipline Information Technology (IT). We bow before it because of its power and its systematic nature. Borrowing the relevant elements from IT for our discipline (library science) is well and good, but there is still the opportunity and the obligation to develop this library science in an Indian way because India has a unique cultural tradition and a rich tradition of library science. In this article, I will introduce a number of concepts from Indian thought and culture, and tie them to an approach to library science that includes the idea of *Bhodhivanam*, a "forest environment" for the library and the reader.

The father of Indian library science, Dr. S. R. Ranganathan has contributed a lot to the rich tradition of librarianship in India. During his studies abroad he became familiar with the western tradition of library science. At home in India, he helped develop a view and practice of librarianship that reflect Indian culture. Today we must continue his work. While we may learn from the West, we can contribute something that is uniquely Indian to this discipline of library and information science.

Eastern (Indian) and Western (Scholastic) Approach to Reality (Vineeth, p.12)

Eastern (Indian)	Western(Scholastic)
Interiorization	Exteriorization
Subjective	Objective
Mystic (experience)	Scientific (experiment)
Search	Research

Contemplative Thinking	Calculative Thinking
Intuitive	Rational
Qualitative	Quantitative
Immanent	Transcendent

Reality and Knowledge According to an Indian Perspective

The Indian approach to reality is to seek reality in one's self. Reality is encountered in one's own consciousness. Consciousness means awareness of the self. In the Indian tradition, the word *atman* or "self" can mean the individual self and the divine self. Reality is encountered through the consciousness of the individual self and of the eternal self in the individual self. The understanding, experiencing and interpreting of the self is called exteriorization.

The individual self (*jivatman*) which is centered in consciousness is in a body which again exists in the world. The individual self together with its body is called a microcosm (miniature universe). In contrast, the Divine Self (*paramatman*) together with its body is called macrocosm. The center of this macrocosm is the *paramatman* who is *Brahman* (the highest reality, the eternal)*,* whereas the center of the microcosm is the *jivatman*. Since *jivatman* contains in itself the reflection of *paramatman*, in the last analysis *Brahman* is the ultimate center of the macro- and microcosm.

This ultimate center of consciousness cannot be proved but is to be experienced slowly by way of listening, pondering and realizing (*sravanam, mananam, nididhyasanam*). In the depth of the experience we are taken from *jivatman* to *paramatman.* Man's ultimate content is God's own image. Image always indicates something original. *Jivatman*, when properly understood, leads man to the divine in himself. In short, understanding himself in depth, man understands God.

The Changing universe rotates around the unchanging center, the ultimate reality, the supreme consciousness. And we reach this consciousness in quiet and silence in the same way as we dive and reach the still bottom of a turbulent sea. To achieve this we have to silence all our senses and thus be free from all emotional conflicts. With this process of silencing a *yogi* becomes capable of remaining unchanged in the changing life situations. As in the macrocosm the changing universe rotates around the unchanging *Brahman*, so in the microcosm all the outer layers of consciousness, which are rapidly changing, will be centered on and guided by the steady consciousness of the *yogi*.

Human knowledge draws intelligibility from sensibility. This is done with a dynamic activity of the mind known as abstraction. Abstraction, as the word signifies, is a process of drawing from (Latin *ab-trahere*). It is drawing of the essence of a thing from its sensible data. Philosophically, abstraction is defined as the consideration of one aspect of reality or being, leaving other aspects unconsidered. Thus when one says 'man is a rational animal' one abstracts what is common in all human beings one has encountered, but leave aside the particularities of each of them. This kind of abstraction in which the totality of the essence of a species is drawn from different individuals is known as total abstraction. Both what is

abstracted and what is left aside is total. Total essence is abstracted; total individuality is left aside.

Bhava and *Anubhava* are most important results of reading. "When knowledge is related to the being he encounters, it is called lower knowledge (*apara-vidya*) and can be objectified. When, on the contrary, knowledge is realizing the *atman* within, it is called higher knowledge (*para-vidya*) and refuses to be objectified. It is simply the experience of the *atman* as the knower" (Vineeth, p. 39) There are experiences and these experiences will change man. If we go back to Indian scriptures and sacred tradition there was no bibliography, no indexing, no key word search, no printed form, not even a written form. A communication and learning method called *sruti* and *smriti* allowed the enjoyment of the scripture in depth.

The Past Has Given Way to the New

Today our situation has undergone a great change from the past and the past has given way to the new. The present situation stands influenced by the west.

Old Tradition	Present State (Influenced by West)
Scholars were seekers of wisdom.	They are browsers of information
They searched for truth.	They search for key words.
Whenever one met with a ray of wisdom they meditated upon it.	Whenever one comes across a piece of information, one looks for related terms
They used *sravana – manana – nitidhyasana*.	They use multimedia kits.

Here we have to distinguish the meaning of terms, wisdom (*jnanam*), knowledge (*vijnanam*), and information (*vivaram*). Wisdom stands for the highest kind of knowledge and it is like the *jnana* of God. The knowledge, which is lower than wisdom can be attained by disciplined training (*tapas*). The information is at a still lower level. Information only shows the way and it is *not* the way or the destination in itself.

Systematic Approach of West and Meditative Approach of East

The systematic approach of the modern age has resulted in quantitative growth, and this in turn has resulted in an explosion of information. This is a western approach, and it emphasizes on quantity. The focus is on a macro level.

At the same time, the eastern approach, and especially the Indian traditional approach to knowledge, is a meditative approach. This Indian approach emphasizes quality and the focus here is on a micro level development.

Method of Learning in the Cultural Heritage of India

Education in ancient India was not merely an information process but a transformation process. It is not a coaching for a career, to be used as a means for the livelihood. It was a matter of the cultural discipline of a person who belonged to a group of enlightened people who lived and worked in a society with some common goal, such as welfare of the world (*lokasamgraha).*

Just as intellectual training involves achieving harmony with one's own interior and exterior realms of being, so also it involves environmental harmony with Nature and its rhythms. Man learns many things from his natural environment. The universe is perhaps the greatest library filled with unwritten but powerfully eloquent sources of learning.

The Creative Tension

There is a point of tension for Indian librarians. We cannot totally deny the systematic or western approach, as it has its own advantages. The west has contributed a lot in the fields of systematization and processing of information. Nevertheless, we Indians have been slow to introduce or develop a program that uses a meditative approach to preserve eastern values. If easterners, the people of a great tradition, are idle, that will cause the decline of the universe of knowledge. In the future we will not be able to see knowledge and wisdom anywhere in the world because of over-emphasis on information. This is where the uniqueness of the Indian approach can contribute.

Not Store Keepers But Promoters of Knowledge/Wisdom

Librarians are not storekeepers, but the promoters of knowledge and wisdom. We have to undertake this responsibility to give shape to the universe of knowledge. We must take it upon ourselves as an obligation to find out ways and means to improve the Indian approach to the universe of knowledge.

Bhodhivanam: Innovative Ways and Complementary Thought from the Indian Tradition

What is *Bhodhivanam? Bhodhivanam* is a forest environment for a library. The library has to provide a new kind of reading environment that is like a forest. It is a dream vision or concept. The seed of this concept can be seen in the writings of Ranganathan. "There should be an open air reading room for the cooler hours of the day." (Ranganathan: 25) To execute this idea we have to plan cautiously, considering the security and discipline of the library. Here the reading is not just a browsing but *Sravana* (listen), *Manana* (ponder), *Nitidhyasana* (realize). It will lead the reader to *anubhava* (emotive identification or understanding). He will also be able to give *bhavas* (action) to his ideas with the help of this environment. This type of reading is recommended for the people with the spirit of meditative mind. At the same time it is more applicable for reading the sacred scriptures, interpretation of scriptures, poetical writings and classical works.

Process in the *Bhodhivanam*

A process of coding and decoding is happening there. Reading is a kind of decoding of original ideas of an author by the reader .To understands this decoding we have to have knowledge of the coding. Coding is nothing but articulation of an idea of an author using the medium of language. The language, its words and expressions are like codes. These codes contain the original thoughts and ideas of an author. The environment of the author is invisibly reflected in these codes.

Decoding happens in the mind of the reader. Here the reading is not just a browsing. It is a kind of meditative reading. It is an action of *Sravana* (listening), *Manana* (pondering), and *Nitidysana* (realizing). The reader is reading the mind of author. The mind of the reader will become one with that of the author. This stage, we can say, is *samanahredaya* (empathy), and we can call this reader *sahridayan* (empathetic or aesthetic.)

In this type of reading the environment has a great role to play. For example, a good reader who reads Geetanjali of Tagore in a library room will get one kind of experience. But he would get a better experience if he could read the same book under a big tree with flowers in a natural environment .The same is the case of most of the Indian classics.

Many of the classical books of India have been written or coded in a forest or natural environment. To decode these books, therefore, the meditative reader requires a similar environment. The library must be able to satisfy this type of meditative reader by providing a more natural environment. The library can extend this type of environment into a garden library, cave library, and a rooftop library.

Conclusion

I have tried to unveil the depth and richness of some Indian concepts for the consideration of my fellow librarians. This is only a beginning and we have to go a long distance. Western scientists are ready to share what they have. Those with an Indian view of library science should be equally ready to share. I invite your ideas and suggestions for enriching this idea of *Bhodhivanam*.

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Notes

One who practices *Yoga* is *yogi* and *Yoga* is one of the spiritual disciplines of Acharya Patanjali.

Bhava = Mood of action

Anubhava= Emotive identification or understanding

mananam = Pondering

nididhyasanam = Realizing

Sruti = What is heard, learning through hearing

smriti = What is remembered

samanahredaya = Heart filled with the same aesthetic/emotions of author

sahridayan= The person one who has *samanahredaya* (aesthetic heart)

sravanam= Listening