CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

2.0 Introduction

The aim of this study is to identify and assess the role played by the British Council Libraries in India with reference to promoting higher education. In other words, this is an attempt to bring out the reasons behind the popularity of the British Council Libraries in the academic circles and find out what the libraries do for them to earn a reputation equal to that of an academic library. For this it is essential to have an understanding of the topic at hand. This chapter reviews all the available studies written on the British Council Libraries that were published in the form of monographs, journal articles and even articles that appeared in the Council’s in-house journals.

2.1 Related Studies

The literature available on the topic was scattered or spread over different kinds of sources like books, journals, reports, newspapers and internal documents. The most striking factor about all these sources was that they spoke the same language. Except for Saunders and Broome1(1977), Donaldson2 (1984) and Coombs3 (1988), the materials that had public access did not reveal much. They all had the same thing to say, may be using different words, about the Council, cultural diplomacy, books work and how the libraries are viewed by the local user groups. The brand name of the Council, it seemed, was enough to place the libraries at a pedestal. The pieces that appeared in newspapers were simply another version of the official releases handed out to them. They either reproduced them verbatim or just reported the events, with an interview or two with the person-in-charge.

Another genre of available materials was articles that appeared in learned periodicals in the library field. Here also what is significant is that they were written by the British Council officers. Adam4, 5 (1949, 1955), Adam and Hickman6 (1965) Barnicot7,8,9 (1947,1951,1963), Evans10 (1964), Flood11 (1972) Glaister12 (1952), Hodgson13 (1975) and White14 (1965) had all been British
Council staff with long associations with the library work. As the years suggest, all these were written about the British Council Libraries when they were being established worldwide and also before the introduction of information technology in the 1980s. Most of the articles written during this period were about the books work and book selection policy of the British Council Libraries. This is because the authors, especially Flood, were behind the shaping of the library policies in these areas and as the history of the British Council Libraries show, they always had to defend the books grant in view of the frequent budget cuts imposed on the libraries. Naturally they had to highlight the books activity and its impact on the target groups in the ‘partnering’ countries.

All this leaves a researcher with very little on the British Council Libraries in the later years. The annual reports have much statistics to offer but very little of any thing concrete on the role of the British Council Libraries in promoting culture or education. Report after report reels off corporate objectives, country plan, polices and strategies with different coinage of words and terms but meaning the same. They fail to give a comprehensive picture of what the British Council does and what the British Council Libraries do. This is evident when one examines the annual reports for the last 3-4 years. The British Council Libraries/ information centres, their information/books work, even the details of the British Council Libraries worldwide - the annual reports of the 1970s and even the early 1980s had a list of British Council Libraries displayed as an appendix - are conspicuous by their absence and everything is covered under the vague term ‘information work of the British Council’. This glaring omission makes one wonder whether it is an indirect admission that the libraries no longer occupy the centre stage in the British Council activities.

Viewed from this angle, only three works stand out - Saunders and Broome\textsuperscript{15}, the first authoritative review of the library work of the British Council, Donaldson\textsuperscript{16}, analyzing the first 50 years of the British Council including its library work and thirdly, Coombs\textsuperscript{17}, an essential reading for those interested in the history and development of the British Council Libraries as well as to anyone researching British ‘Cultural Diplomacy’. Any work on British Council will be incomplete without a reading of the three because taken together, they give the
researcher a clue about the policies and the changes of direction the British Council took from the year of its inception to the late 1980s. From this period onwards, as the British Council’s history shows, the libraries were recessed to the background and decentralization also became inevitable with more powers to the Regional Representatives. This period has been very turbulent for the British Council especially because of the political and economic compulsions and also because of the rapid advances technology made in information work. But surprisingly except for the reports and internal documents no concrete evidence is there to show how re-engineering and reprioritizing was successfully carried out at the British Council.

This is where the researcher encounters a problem. The Council, despite its ‘Freedom of Information’ policy, keeps many things to itself and many documents are classified in the sense that they are not accessible even for the purpose of research. Its cultural stance and the resultant immunity allow the Council to be accountable only to itself and to the UK Government. In an attempt to understand the working and the international perspective of the Council, the researcher had to search even the House of Commons (United Kingdom) site for reports pertaining to the Council. The search yielded results and they are also included as literature on the British Council Libraries.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, newspaper articles were scanned to get an idea about the various activities of British Council Libraries in India. Because of the Council’s policy of encouraging media coverage, both print and visual, almost all its activities get a mention in the local media and this helped the researcher to chronicle them in such a way as to analyze the multifaceted nature of the British Council Libraries and present the spectra of activities of emphasize the point that the British Council and the British Council Libraries are one and the same in the eyes of an average educated Indian user.

All these do not mean that studies on British Council Libraries have not been carried out. There have been three major studies - two of them doctoral and the third, an MBA dissertation- on British Council Libraries in India, by Bhat18 (2002), Khan19 (2003) and Visakhan20 (2001) respectively. Whereas Bhat and Visakhan, again by sheer coincidence staff of British Council Libraries in India, concentrate
on the marketing of library services, Khan focuses on the British Council Library experience. The former are significantly relevant in the present era of management and global competition.

No proper study has been done so far on the impact of the libraries on a particular target group. This is what the researcher wants to take up through the present study. Another important source of information is the British Council site itself. It is very informative, gives the 70-year history of the British Council in a chronological order with timeline and branches out to its gamut of activities.

The in-house publications of the British Council also provide in-depth information about the various activities of the British Council. Most of them, like “Connecting,” are offered online as well. Newsletters of the library network are also a useful source for brief case studies on a particular aspect of the library like book selection or user education. Thus it will be seen that the literature on British Council Libraries are available in various forms like books (monographs), journal articles, newspaper clippings/stories, in-house magazines, PG/PhD dissertations, printed versions of the parliament proceedings and available from the net through sites the British Council website. For the sake of convenience, the researcher has organized the library review along the same lines, under the above categories. Under each category, they are arranged in the chronological order.

The review of the available literature on British Council confirms the following:

i. British Council and British Council Libraries are complementary and supplementary to each other;

ii. Policies play an important role in the British Council Libraries especially in defining target audiences, collection and services;

iii. There is a willingness to learn and correct which is very essential for the successful functioning of a network, though within circles, there still remains a resistance to change in India;
iv. British Council Libraries are managed in a professional manner and innovation is the keyword;

v. Customer satisfaction is the be-all and end-all for the British Council Libraries;

vi. The new library policy is the result of adapting its books policy to the changed needs of liberated Europe and Asia;

vii. The policies facilitate the educational needs of the target groups; and

viii. The success of British Council Libraries show that a good and adequate library service can make even a limited supply of books serve a much larger reading public than the absolute number of titles and the print runs indicate.

It also reveals that critical evaluation of the library work is to be done in an objective manner. Such studies will be of mutual benefit to both the Council and the countries it serves. Except for the annual surveys carried out by the libraries; no proper study has been done so far on the impact of the libraries on a particular target group or its role in and contribution to India and her developmental / educational needs. Critical evaluation of the library is an avenue the British Council Libraries have not, at least to all public appearances, pursued with any serious enthusiasm. It is understandable that most of the studies conducted so far fail to touch on sensitive or redoubtable issues, for, with the exception of Saunders and Broome, they were carried out by British Council Library staff. Also, while certain over-emphasis might have to be laid on some functions of the British Council Libraries in order for them to get the required logistics, other areas should not be ignored and/or eventually sacrificed. The Council should also try to take cognizance of the fact that its membership base is on a decline in some centres and adopt appropriate and specific policies so that there is minimum disruption to the services it had most effectively rendered its members in the last seventy years.
2.2 Supporting & Educational Role

An important study on the British Council to appear was that of Saunders & Broome that stresses the supporting and educational role of British Council Libraries and how it should support education. The review was originally commissioned by the Director-General of the British Council to provide an unbiased assessment of its library and information services. The authors were encouraged to undertake a wide-ranging and critical examination of all aspects with a view to guiding the Council in the development of a library and information service capable of meeting the challenging demands of 1980s. In the course of the review, which was the first of its kind, thirty three Council offices and libraries in nineteen different countries and all the relevant departments and divisions in London were visited. The objectives and the role of the Council libraries overseas were examined and the conclusion and recommendations are:

i. Library and information services have an essential part to play in any representation in support of the Council’s programme;

ii. It is possible to differentiate between the library as a support service and as a programme area. These roles need to be recognized and adequate resources of money and manpower allocated;

iii. The library should be the focal point for information in representation and all resources should be concentrated there or at the very least, co-coordinated there;

iv. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on training the librarian as a special librarian, in book development work, in English language development and educational and scientific enquiry work;

v. More Council scholarships for professional education and training in the United Kingdom;

vi. The effectiveness of book exhibitions is to be monitored more closely and the possibility of establishing many more Book Information Centre explored;

vii. Third World Country students to be provided with a service and the staffing, accommodation and financial implications of this to be recognized by the re-allocation of existing resources;
viii. The Council should seek funds to provide an effective library service to
diplomatic staff and their families;
ix. Expatriates might be charged for the service;
x. The fact that the Council library services are intended for the indigenous population should be more widely publicized; and
xi. The possibility of providing libraries jointly with other Commonwealth countries should be explored.

Evans outlines the educational work of overseas libraries of the British Council in general and those in Pakistan in particular. The British Council opened its first library in 1950 in Karachi and there has always been an emphasis on its educational role. One feature of the expansion of the library network in Pakistan had been the creation of Student Library containing many copies of the principal British text books prescribed in the University syllabi. As in India a book box scheme also operated from Karachi for the benefit of those who could not visit the library. In addition to this, a large number of books and periodical subscriptions were presented to many institutions, university libraries and schools throughout the country. Evans gives a detailed description of other services and activities like photocopying, film shows, play, readings, music recitals and lectures.

The British Council Libraries have never been traditional public libraries. They have always developed themselves according to the needs of their customers and user feedback has always been the key factor in the development of the library's collections and services. Iqbal's account of the British Council Library network in Pakistan illustrates this point and shows that the British Council Libraries, as elsewhere, have remained committed to provision of modern and up-to-date books, periodicals and information, using the latest technology available. This has greatly benefited the student community, especially those in the medical field.

Iqbal's another narrative on the British Council experience takes a closer look at the technological strides the British Council Libraries have made in providing "best of British Library and Information service" from the day it came to Pakistan in 1947. "These libraries have come a long way during the last fifty years."
catalogues to microfiche and then finally fully integrated automated library system represent a remarkable development. Move from traditional book lending library to high-tech information centres is our way forward into the 21st century”. Javed Iqbal, Assistant Director, Pakistan (LIS), the British Council Lahore, lists out the Council’s future plans like setting up of Britain Online to provide an online information system with free access throughout Pakistan. He visualises a future when a user can access and seek information twenty four hours a day, “just like one can get cash from the road side ATM”. From 2003, this has indeed become a reality for a British Council Library member.

In a sample of the routine surveys that are carried out every year in the British Council Libraries, an assessment is done with regards to library use and its supporting role. Every year such surveys are conducted at the British Council Libraries to get a feedback from the members, on the basis of which changes are made in collection development and the nature of services. In one such Library User Survey (1997), a total of two hundred and eighteen members were administered questionnaires. The major findings are:

i. Majority of them (Eighty seven out of two hundred and eighteen) visited the library at least once a week and fifty four were in the habit of visiting the library once in two weeks;

ii. Among services and facilities, borrowal of books was the one service that was used most. One hundred and eight out of two hundred and eighteen borrowed books very frequently, that is, more than once a month. Ninety did once a month and the lowest on priority was inter-library loan, with two hundred and two never having availed the facility at all;

iii. Academic and study needs topped the list of the purpose of library use. Ninety nine members very frequently used the library for this purpose and professional updating was the second best purpose, followed by recreational and general reading. But many frequently used the library for this purpose;

iv. But the British Library has been able to completely satisfy the professional needs of only thirteen out of the two hundred and eighteen, whereas ninety-six feel that their academic and study needs are mostly met by the library; and

v. The satisfaction level is very high, with two hundred and six either very satisfied or satisfied with the library and its services.
Suseela Kumar describes the British Council’s library development programme, the establishment of the regional and branch libraries and the wide range of library and information services to various user communities. Historical sketch presenting the past, present and the future of the British Council Libraries in India and how they have contributed much to the intellectual and cultural partnership between India and Britain in the post-independence era is given. The analysis shows that in India, the growth of the Council library and information work reflects the intellectual and cultural growth of independent India and the educational role the British Council Libraries can play in the lives of the academic and student communities in India. Kumar hopes that in spite of the changes in the government in United Kingdom, “altruistic self-interest may well shape the Council’s policy or their overseas libraries to support education, education and yet more education.”

2.3 ‘Books Work’

In addition to its library and information service activities, the Council has a variety of programmes which it calls ‘books work’. This includes book promotion work, book exhibitions and other forms of assistance to the British book trade and advisory and missionary work to strengthen the local profession and practice of library and information work. Adam sees the British Council Libraries as information providers and also feels that they have a definite role in promoting reading habit among the public, especially among students. In his presidential address to the Library Association, Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, who was the Director-General of the British Council at that time, narrates the books work of the British Council in Europe and the Colonies and the close ties it had with the book trade. According to him, the British Council had always appreciated the unique contribution, which books and periodicals, librarians and libraries would make to its work throughout the world. But the sanctions imposed by the war compelled the Council to seek other avenues to promote British thoughts through the printed word and this resulted in the revival of Book Export Scheme, operated by the Central Office of Information. The scheme gave an added importance to the Council libraries in the “ex-belligerent countries” and this importance grew in the succeeding years. Adam also makes mention of the loan scheme of the British
Council which benefited many universities and students and says that in Eastern Europe, "one of the few loopholes to the West is through the Council Library."

As for the Council’s library work in the Colonies, the Council had a definite library policy: "...that, wherever possible, a coordinating scheme must be the background of all library planning. In other words, the library basis must be the region and not isolated points." The net result was that many colonies became book and library conscious and the article describes the various book promotion activities of the British Council like books presentations, book exhibitions, bibliography compilation and its own publications viz., British Books News, Britain Today, The British Medical Bulletin, British Agricultural Bulletin, British Science News and English Language Teaching, the last one being the only journal devoted exclusively to the technique of teaching English to foreigners. He concludes by stressing the importance of libraries: "The Council uses all media and methods for its main purpose, to increase throughout the world a knowledge and understanding of Britain and no medium can be important than the printed word."

Barnicot concentrates more on the book selection policy and the collection development of the British Council Libraries worldwide and how it was affected by budgetary cuts. Highlighting the importance of the Council’s libraries abroad, it emphasizes the reference and bibliographical work undertaken by the overseas librarians with due importance given to small special libraries within the Council such as the Science Library, the Medical Library, the Fine Arts Library and the Music Library. It concludes with an observation that financial cuts imposed "by the Treasury upon the Council as a whole and reduced to only about 25% if what it was five years ago, the task of freshening the libraries with newly published works is hard enough to accomplish."

The first important study on British Council was by White on British Council's completing 25 years of cultural work. Tracing the circumstances that led to the formation of the British Council, White, one of the pioneers of the pre-War Council, recollects how the Council was formed and the initial 'books work' to build cultural bridges with other countries.
In an internal document, Spears\textsuperscript{31} who was then the Head of Information Resources Unit (IRU), British Council (India) analyses the book selection policy of the British Council Libraries. The 6-page document is very significant in that it was written just before book selection became decentralized; in other words, just before regional representatives were given full liberty to select their own books without orders having to pass through Delhi.

Spears gives an outline of the situation prevalent at that time and points out some factors as a supplementary note to the revised book selection guidelines. The note is mainly on the decision to include more recreational material for target members. He advocates a cautious approach while tackling this: “Every new subject introduced will be a continuing commitment to keep it up-to-date. Books on many of these sporting and recreational areas outdate very quickly and so can be costly to maintain.” If the freedom to buy more recreational materials is exercised, Spears fears it can lead to friction between members and staff, as well as a likelihood of increase in non-target members. There is finality when he says: “Increasing members and issues is not an end in itself. To have a smaller, but targeted, membership using our libraries principally to borrow material for professional and academic purposes is the success criterion that still applies.”

Subramoni\textsuperscript{32} discusses the basic issues relating to discarding of books in library in general and the British Council Libraries in particular. Subramoni goes into the various factors involved in this process, starting from the underlying principles and need for discarding. Citing the British Council Libraries as an example, he brings out the advantages of keeping collections trim and stresses the importance of planning and developing a systematic method of library weeding, which is the hallmark of British Council Library policy.

How successful the new book selection policy has been is what Sankaraiah\textsuperscript{33} attempts to find out. His experiment is in fact a case study proving the importance of book selection. Sankaraiah studies the effectiveness of the book selection policy of the British Council Libraries in India. A pilot study was carried out in the British Council Library, Madras to find out how well the new books were used and to see whether or not ninety percent of them have been borrowed at least five times during
the previous one year using a sample survey of about hundred books added to the stock during that period. It was found that in all, the hundred books had a total number of 705 loans to their credit, with only seventy two books being borrowed five times or more during the one-year period, which showed that the book selection was effective only to the extent of 72% as against the expected 90%. But the average number of loans per books was seven, which was quite good. Another important finding was that too specialized books have lesser appeal to the readership that the British Council Libraries attract.

Written on the occasion of the British Council's 50th year a web article traces the history of the British Council Libraries in India "in a humorous vein". From one library and a single member 50 years ago, the British Council Libraries has branched out to 12 cities across the country. It outlines the various activities of the British Council library network in India and makes special mention of the book promotion work undertaken by the library, especially the special display of the Booker prize nominations. There is appreciation for the books work being provided by the British Council Libraries in India.

Thakur's study throws light on the activities of the British Library at Pune. He says that Pune has the second highest membership among British Libraries the world over, with around 13,500 regular members. According to the report, it is next only to Colombo in terms of the number of memberships and the membership growth has been on an average of 15% every year. He is of the opinion that the British Council Libraries promote reading.

2.4 Enabler & Facilitator

Flood gives a brief general introductory description of the Council’s work in the fields of librarianship and information science and the printed word and covers the major expansion of the Council’s activities like educational work, specialist collection, libraries department and training facilities during the ten year period from 1960 to 1970. Citing Carl White's contention that the Council’s library development work is "an act of statesmanship which sought permanently to enrich the life of the people" the author says that this would be possible only if the
Council had expert staff. He supports White’s conclusions as to the role of the British Council Librarian in a developing country: “...he (the British Council Librarian) is for the host country a resident regional library consultant and prudently-senior expert for other agencies of Her Majesty’s government to consult before riding off with library aid in different directions; or, as a grateful reader put it in more picturesque language, the Council library is full of cloth bound everything-ness and the Council librarian is he on whose shoulders the entire skeleton of the British Council revolves.” Flood sees the British Council Libraries as an enabler and facilitator, supporting the educational needs of those in the higher education.

Sir Archibald Nye, the then UK High Commissioner in India, inaugurated British Council Library in Madras, now known as Chennai, on 12 March 1950. Written on the occasion of its 25th year, a newspaper article traces the development of British Council Libraries in the southern states in general and Chennai in particular:

“The British Council Libraries have enriched education in general and English teaching in particular, in the four southern states, though its original modest aim had been the encouragement of the study of the English language. Likewise its library services, primarily designed to inform users of British achievements in various spheres, have turned out to be the envy of bigger lending libraries! The Library’s contribution, to say the least, has been spectacular influencing a whole generation of the reading public”.

It also gives some (1975 statistics) facts about the British Council Library, Chennai: In 1950, the stock was 2000 and there was only one staff. Whereas in 1975, the library had over 90,000 books (including 4000 reference books) 222 periodicals and catered to 13,032 members and had 14 staff. It also provides the following information about the British Council Library:

1. On an average each member had borrowed (during 1974-75) 44.4 books and periodicals.
2. 5, 79,058 books issued in 1974-75:
   
   .06% - Religion
   10.5% - Literature
   33.6% - fiction
   22% - Applied Sc and Tech
   11% - Pure science

3. About 6000 books added, 3000 withdrawn

4. 20% of the total membership is students, 25.4% technical and professional class, 23.3% employed white collar and 6.5% teachers.

5. The library receives more than 15 inquiries per day on an average.

The Silver Jubilee special has many articles by eminent personalities. In his foreword, Sir John Llewellyn, the Director General, British Council, writes:

"Even though the emphasis of the Council's work has since then gradually changed to meet the demands made on it by departments in the educational, scientific and technical fields, the library is no less important now than it was 25 years ago - important for scholars, scientists, professional men and women and creative artists".

According to Gibbs: "Libraries are of many kinds and exist to fulfill many purposes but if I were asked what was the one thing we have constantly attempted to achieve through our libraries, I think I would say that it is to provide services relevant and helpful to the needs and wishes of its users".

Ramaswami in "a personal essay" written on the same occasion of the silver Jubilee of the British Council Libraries, Chennai pays rich tribute to the collection and services offered by the library. "Candour compels the admission that British Council Libraries is what Macaulay said of Boswell's life in a racing metaphor: Eclipse is first, the rest no where".
Indian users have always been appreciative of the services rendered by the British Council Libraries. Biswas discusses the origin of British Council Libraries in India and how the library in Delhi started functioning on the second floor of a rented v-shaped building in the heart of the city. He describes in detail the problems faced in renovation work and utilization of some additional space made available in 1967 after 20 years and finally the task of designing and moving the library from the second floor to the first floor of the same old building in 1979 at a very short notice with minimum period of closure of the library to the public. He deals in detail with the layout plans of the expansion work in 1976 and the complete plan of the redesigned library in 1979 on the first floor.

A study conducted by Seema focuses on the British Library, Thiruvananthapuram, it being a pioneer institution in the case of Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) in Kerala, which permits instantaneous, direct and sophisticated access to information. The findings of the study are:

1. Most of the users are satisfied with the OPAC facility, the online guidance and the display of entries/search results on the screen.

2. The pattern of OPAC use:

   i) Computer science specialists and students, who are in majority, use the facility more than other categories.

   ii) Half of the users of OPAC use it frequently, less than half use it occasionally and a few use it only once or twice.

3. OPAC is very user friendly and time-saving.

The study also reveals that OPAC is successful in those libraries where the total collection forms part of the catalogue database as in British Library, Thiruvananthapuram. The LibSys software package, used in the British Library network for integrated library management, is another favourable factor which has helped in the smooth, easy acceptance of the OPAC.
Khan, examining the objectives, activities and services of the British Council Libraries, attempts a futuristic view of the British Council Libraries in India. The major findings are:

1. The information resources and services are extensively used and information needs of the user community are satisfied;

2. Most of the British Library professionals are providing satisfactory services;

3. Application of information technology in library has an immediate relationship with the quality of services and user satisfaction; and

4. Liberalisation process has resulted in public acceptance of the concept of fee-based library services.

Based on the outcome of the study, Khan sees British Council Libraries more as facilitators and information providers and concludes that "the British Libraries in the future should have to emerge as centres of information for the community of the users with a deep understanding of the information universe and its organization, and the one which promotes the mechanisms that link the two together".

2.5 British Council's Library Policy

British Council Libraries are known for their policies and policy changes. Adam traces the historical background and the policy changes of the British Council Libraries and critically examines the British Council's library work in Commonwealth countries, colonies, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and the Far East during the 50s. He highlights the regional variations and how, as a public library, importance should be given to services in the British Council Libraries. Adam sees the success as "an expression of faith in the inestimable value of Council library not only to the Council and foreign and commonwealth relations, but also to the people of other countries". The Council Libraries at that time were distributed over fifty countries and "local needs are always and everywhere the
The article mentions some of the common elements of the libraries like book selection, technical processing and reference and bibliographical service. As for subscriptions, the Council had been forced by financial cuts to charge subscriptions, though much against its principles. Describing the British Council Libraries in Commonwealth countries and the colonies as ‘unique,’ Adam gives a brief survey of the British Council’s library work in India, Pakistan and Ceylon, which had a “ready-made clientele”. The success of the library is attributed to the careful choice of the book stocks for each country. Referring to the Council’s work in African countries, Adam says that “whatever praise or criticism the Council’s library work in general may have deserved, there is no doubt that in those colonies where it has demonstrated the virtues of public library services and has assisted in the creation of those services, it has achieved something which, had it done nothing else, would have amply justified its existence”. Even while acknowledging the important roles played by the British institutes and Anglophile societies, in promoting British thought and culture, Adam reiterates that Council offices are also slowly emerging as cultural centres housing libraries in Europe and the Middle East whereas the library work seems to be lagging behind in south East Asia and Japan. This leads to the conclusion that “the British Council has a great task to do in India, Pakistan and in the Far East and Middle East”.

This is supported by a report of a four-day seminar on ‘Librarianship and Information Science in 2001’ organized by the British Council Library, Chennai. Prof. W.L. Saunders, the then Director, Postgraduate School of Librarianship and Information Science, Sheffield University (UK) inaugurated the seminar: “The move towards co-operation among the different types of library – public, academic and special – is a powerful one and by 2001 the boundaries will have become very blurred.” In the 21st century, there would be a vastly greater appreciation of the importance and economic “value” of information as a commodity. Saunders says, “Men and women in positions of influence and importance would become much more keenly aware of the vast untapped sources of information than they are today. The nature of their demands on the library profession would undergo a qualitative change. The British Council Libraries’ efforts will be subjected to a much more information and critical scrutiny than we have known so far”.

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Kraske explores the historical development of British Council Libraries and their role in the provision of information, in library development and in the interchange of professional ideas and experiences. The paper is divided into sections like “Formation and early years, World War II and the early Post-War Period” and “The Libraries in Recent Years.” In the last section, Kraske analyses the important changes in policy, organization and service that affected Council operations in the seventies. It also tries to bring out the impact of budget cuts on the libraries and expresses the fear that this may force the British Council to play a greatly reduced role in the future and that it may cloud the future of the Council’s library, information and books activities. The study concludes that in spite of all its problems, British Council’s assistance over the long term perhaps will be most effective: “The hunger for books in developing countries is especially urgent and there remains a desperate need for adequate library services.” To illustrate this point, Kraske quotes a letter by one grateful member of the Bombay library to the Council: “In my opinion, the British Council Library is the best in Bombay, particularly from the point of view of many employed students who pursue various professional qualifications.”

Donaldson traces the history of the British Council since it was first created in 1934 as the cultural arm of Britain. Besides giving a detailed account of the genesis and development of the British Council covering a period of 50 years the document analyses the various reports – from Leeper’s Memorandum in 1934 to the Seebohm Report in 1981. The study reveals the change of direction of the British Council from an organisation with cultural propaganda to an international network of libraries and offices promoting Britain’s best in culture, thoughts and education. The last part of the document gives in detail a personal account of visits undertaken by the author to various British Council offices in Europe, the Arab countries, Asia and Africa. Of the Council’s work in India, she quotes one of the British Council science officers: “India is a country where they very clearly know what they want from the UK. You very rarely have actually to tell people we have this or that, do you want it? .... what they want is people to come in and interact... they are very western oriented and the Council is working for the mutual benefit of Britain and India”. Donaldson is thoroughly impressed by the work of the British Council.
Libraries in India and makes a mention of the Indian reaction to the abrupt changes in the Council’s library policy that took place in 1978, viz., the doubling of the subscription rates and the weeding out of enormous number of books from the shelves marked fiction and introducing what the Council considered “a more strongly information-oriented pattern of activity”. Justifying the objections raised to this, Donaldson says that “as far as I was concerned, it was grist to a mill I am always grinding, because I believe that, because of the necessity to conform to constant changes of policy and to the cultural standards of the British Treasury, the Council is in continual danger of forgetting the purposes for which it was created”.

Published as part of the Information Adviser Series, Coombs’ book tells the story of the British Council’s library work from the beginning up to the late 1980s. It focuses, in particular, on the Council’s contribution to overseas library development. This book is divided into eight chapters, describing programmes chronologically, and reflecting the growth of the Council’s library work. The policy changes that have affected the Council and its libraries are described in detail and an underlying theme is the importance of the Council’s library work in relation to its other activities.

There are very few studies on the British Council Libraries and Coombs’ book is essential reading for librarians, especially those concerned with international librarianship and British ‘cultural diplomacy.’ A considerable portion of the book is devoted to the British Council Libraries in India through which one is able to get an insider’s view of the Council as well.

In another study on British Council Libraries in India, Bhat looks at the network from the angle of a manager and describes the sustained marketing strategies adopted by the Council to get repeated customers and also to get new customers. According to him, the main strategy is providing services of high standards by a combination of various methods such as staff training, customer care meeting, written ‘service standards’, ‘customer care characters’, monitoring of service quality by senior staff and staff motivation. Bhat justifies the policies that shape the British Council Libraries in India. He suggests that Library Information Centre managers should give adequate attention to market the services since it
helps “to focus the efforts, ensures the use of resources and makes a professional impact.”

Banerjee\textsuperscript{53} is highly critical of the policy changes that have taken place in the British Council. He recalls with nostalgia the old premises of the British Council Library, Calcutta, which was once a favourite haunt of book-lovers. Describing how the library played a major role in inculcating love for books for the people of Kolkata, Banerjee makes a comparison between the old and the new cyber face of the British Council Library and finds the latter wanting in many things - space, number of books and aristocratic grandeur: “Yes, aristocracy is giving way to modernity. And with it is changing the warmth and courtesy that was the hallmark of British tradition…” He ends with rhetoric: “A modern British Council Library \textit{sans} the human touch. Is this called change? Perhaps, yes.” The article is typical of the reaction of the old, loyal members of the British Council who find it difficult to digest and accept the changing face of the Council with its emphasis on education counseling, scholarships and commercial information.

Users’ reaction to the policy changes is either an unquestioning acceptance or a defying mood as proved by Islam’s\textsuperscript{54} study. She takes stock of the activities of the British Council Library, Dhaka, which is the ninth largest in the world. According to her, in the 50 years of its existence in Bangladesh, the British Council Library has played a significant role in helping to develop links between the people and culture of Bangladesh and those of the United Kingdom. Its role has also changed over time from being a ‘marketing machine’ for the UK to an organisation aimed at creating better understanding between countries the world over and ultimately, mutual respect and acceptance. The libraries are more customer-oriented; more so towards students and naturally the demand has made a lot of differences. Islam interviews many people, old and young alike, who were, or, are still members of the British Council library and their opinions reflect the changes that have come over the British Council Libraries. There are some who criticise the British Council Library for its high membership fees and small collection of books and show their disappointment at its present collection. The essentially British nature of the collection is perceived to be another limitation. But Carl Reuter, Director British Council, Dhaka defends this and says, “it is the reality of globalisation. You pay
international prices for international services". As for the expansion of other moneymaking facilities and the library becoming smaller over the years, Reuter says, "the collection of books is the biggest it's ever been. Only the focus is different. From a collection of books largely on literature, we have shifted our focus to variety of disciplines. Our collection is geared to the needs and wants of students who are the majority of our members, with an average age of 23. Students have their needs, and once you are not a student any more these needs change, which results in many senior members feeling excluded, which is understandable". The article outlines the multifarious activities of the library, which include the English Language Self Access Centre, the cyber centre, the young learner's centre, the examination services and the Education promotion and marketing services. The British Council Library is also involved in a number of health programmes and its Governance Unit functions by organising projects and seminars and the like, bringing together non-Government organisations, academic institutions, the media and civil society groups to enhance awareness of the UK's democratic values and processes and to strengthen good governance and human rights in partner countries.

Fakrul Alam represents the other side of the coin. He critically examines the stock and services of the British Council Library in Dhaka and concludes that the nature of the library has changed beyond recognition. It is a frank, forthright evaluation of the British Council Library work in developing countries in general and in Bangladesh in particular and Alam is highly critical of the British Council's current library policy:

"To my dismay, I found that things had gone from bad to worse in the last few years. What services? There is now left only one shelf of literature books and another one devoted to reference items. The library looks pretty and everything is neatly arranged but why does it remind of the artificial, vacuous smile of the catwalk beauty? No doubt, in line with modern concepts of interior design, the library has more space than ever before, but all I see in it is emptiness! Yes, it is smartly done and for the smart people, but where is the world of knowledge in all this?" He advocates for a lowering of the library fees and hopes that it would become a leaner operation and beef up its library services.
Alam is not the only one to doubt the success of the new policies. The British Council itself has similar misgivings. Critically analysing its Strategy 2005, the Council feels that so far Strategy 2005 has been a mixed bag. There were some successes but there are unresolved issues too:

- The British Council has not been able to define or adequately research its wider audiences.
- The British Council does not have enough targets for impact and output, measuring value for money and benchmarking.
- The British Council is not clear about its competitors.
- The British Council seems to have developed an identity crisis: it does not seem to be clear about the kinds of products it should be offering and also its role (publisher, educator, community networker?) This is because it is into so many things like libraries, culture, science, arts, education and Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI).

Kempster tries to take stock of the changes from the management’s point of view. She explores the underlying reasons for such changes but feels they have brought in only success. Reiterating the British Council’s success in working in so many different cultures, she argues that it has flourished through the currency of libraries at the heart of its offer worldwide and credits it to the “locally-appointed staff” working in the overseas offices. The British Council organizes hundreds of activities in over 200 diverse countries. These activities – in arts, science, education and governance – simply try to bring people closer. The contribution of the locally appointed staff in this can never be underrated, and Kempster feels they have been very crucial to the Council’s success. She also highlights the importance of libraries. Touching on the change in focus, Kempster says the Council seeks to have a more targeted presence with its renewed focus on young professionals. She concludes with a call for every librarian to focus on the expertise of working between cultures and maintaining enduring relationships between people.

2.6 British Council Library Vs. Public Library

The British Council Libraries, when they started out, were modelled on public libraries in the UK. But now this has changed, even though it retains some features
of the public library. Shadrach\textsuperscript{58} compares the performance of the British Council Libraries/British Libraries in India with that of the Public libraries in Britain. He finds some resemblances between the two in areas like provision of reference service; enquiry desk, lending service, staff training, and conducting surveys to know what users’ perceptions are etc. His observations are:

i. As for the comparative staff ratio and cost effectiveness, the British Council Libraries/British Libraries are managed with limited number of staff, at times even with semi-professionals at service points;

ii. Reference sources have to be improved upon and a strong reference section has to be built up. At that time, there were thirteen libraries in the network and only four had reference librarians and a separate reference section staffed at all times;

iii. The British Council Libraries/British Libraries in India receive more enquiries that the UK Public Libraries;

iv. All the libraries in the network conduct periodic perception surveys to get a feedback; and

v. All the libraries are equipped with enthusiastic staff and carefully selected materials to meet the requirements of professionals “with any information look out.”

Visakhan’s\textsuperscript{59} study also inquires into the approach of two major libraries in Thiruvananthapuram, viz., the State Central Library and the British Library, towards the information needs of their users. The major findings are:

i. The British Library uses various promotion methods to project it among the target audience whereas the State Central Library does not make any conscious effort to promote its services;

ii. The members of the British Library are mostly professionals, senior government officials, professional and postgraduate students who come from affluent families. Most of them fall into the high income groups whereas the members of the State Central Library are in the low to middle income groups;

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iii. The British Library has given attention to accessibility by providing proper
guiding, systematic arrangement of books and well organised catalogues
system. The State Central Library has to improve its accessibility;

iv. Members find staff at the British Library more helpful than those at the
State Central Library;

v. Members find the service of the British Library as friendlier than that of the
State Central Library;

vi. The Customers of the British Library are more demanding than those of the
State Central Library, because of the variation in education, profession and
income of the respective members;

vii. The members of the British Library use the library for formal study and
continuous professional development whereas the number of members
using the library for recreational use is more in the State Central Library;

viii. The usage of newspapers at the British Library is less because the library
subscribes to British newspapers only; and

ix. Automation has increased the quality of the service the British Library
provides.

Chepesiuk, a Fulbright scholar delves into the problems faced by both public
and academic libraries. It discusses the role played by Bangladesh and European
cultural centres such as the USRS, the British Council, the French Alliance centre
and the German centre, each of which has branches in Dhaka and Chittogong in
Bangladesh, in providing resources to an information-starved country. Starting with
the American Corner, a satellite office of the Information Resource Centre (IRC) of
the US Embassy’s Public Affairs Section, which was opened in 2003, Chepesiuk
analyses the activities of the various centres and comes to the conclusion that “by
far, the largest and most dynamic cultural centre is the British Council, which has
about 8000 books in Dhaka and 3000 in Chittogong. But he finds that “the two
British Council resource centres differ in their content because each caters to local information needs. For instance, the British Council Library in Chittagong focuses on veterinary science faculty and students reflecting the needs of the Chittagong Govt. Veterinary College, whereas no such collection exists in Dhaka. This change in focus is part of the British Council policy to provide information on what is relevant to the geographical area the library serves. The library system as a whole is facing a crisis in Bangladesh. The local library system suffers from many maladies like corruption, inadequate library professional, low salary and poor IT literacy. Because of these factors, the library presence of British Council Libraries and others has not been able to make much headway.

2.7 Information Management & Customer-Orientation

Yet another review of the library work of the British Council worldwide, Adams and Hickman’s attempt is to show the place of British Council Libraries in the wider context of work for cultural relations. Facts about the British Council’s foundation, right from its British committee days and the Royal charter and its financial affairs are given to project the importance and relevance of the library services. The article also stresses the “Unity in diversity” theory but all working towards the expressed common goal of “Promoting a wider knowledge of our United Kingdom and the English language abroad and developing closer cultural relations through book and periodical provision “tailored to fit as closely as possible the needs of the country and the work of the centre for which it is destined”. Analyzing the book selection policy of the British Council, the authors say that “these exclusions by definition and inclusions almost of obligation still leave the selector latitude enough for the exercise of his art which consists of a thorough knowledge of the raw materials allied to a just appraisal of the balance of local requirements and existing library provision”. The article deals at length with the book selection policy of the Council but is critical of the textbook centres that send multiple copies to institutions. Though this service attracted teachers and students and evolved a modified British Council Libraries which is essentially a reference and textbook collection supplementing the book stocks of school, colleges and Universities, the authors feel they have been more of a drain on the stock than can be sustained by the normal processes of book selection.
In a study Bhat \(^{62}\) outlines the marketing approaches used in the British Council Libraries network in India. The market analysis is done in order to get a profile of the customers in these libraries. Excellent customer relations are maintained by delivering quality service. Customer interaction is a continuous process and is ensured by conscious listening to the customers. Meet the Members' programmes questionnaires, surveys and suggestion boxes. Bhat describes in detail how the library use promotional techniques such as mail shots, distribution of publicity material, publicity through the press and advertising, in order to increase the customer base. “Quality service coupled with customer touch goes a long way in the continuous evolution of library service in tune with the customer’s requirements”. Bhat highlights the British Council Libraries as information managers and how they manage information and make it available to a discerning clientele.

In yet another study Bhat \(^{63}\) presents a case study on marketing of library and information services in the context of British Council’s Library Network in India. Justifying the need for management techniques while promoting library services, Bhat feels effective marketing of LIS is a must for successful According to him the information revolution combined with technology has made it necessary for the library to have a systematic programme to anticipate and research into the information requirements of customers and then prepare the appropriate products and services. The British Council Libraries are highly market oriented and various marketing techniques like customer care, quality service, market segmentation, market research and customer interaction and feedback are employed to not only to get repeated customers also to get new ones. This study provides an insight into the working of the library network as an organization/ corporate body and reveals the amount of careful thought and creativity that has gone into knitting the network in the right pattern.

In another study on information management and marketing of British Council Libraries’ services, Bhat \(^{64}\) attempts to examine the various marketing techniques used by the eleven libraries of the British Council network in India. He examines the effectiveness of marketing in terms of library revenue, membership, number of
students enrolled in UK institutions and number of students taking UK examinations in India. Two separate questionnaires were used, one for the library managers to find out the marketing techniques they employ and the other for library users to find out how satisfied they were with the services provided. The survey was conducted in three libraries, viz., Delhi, Lucknow and Chandigarh and they were mailed to the target groups. The major findings are:

i. Most of the library users are satisfied with the existing services. Up to 88% of the customers are satisfied with the quality of service rendered by the library;

ii. Provision of adequate reading materials forms the core of LIS marketing;

iii. Applications of information technology in library have an immediate relationship with the quality of the services and customers' satisfaction. It was found that integration of IT has made a significant difference in the quality of services rendered;

iv. There has been a tradition of 'market - driven' approach in the British Council Libraries from the very beginning. The Choice of reading materials and services are dictated by the local circumstances and not thrust upon from the headquarters;

v. Promotional efforts could expand the customer base only up to a certain extent. To go beyond that, good stock renewal is a must;

vi. Mere aggressive promotion will not get members unless the stock quality and renewal ratio is maintained at the accepted level;

vii. Most of the promotional efforts in the library go to promote the revenue-oriented services such as lending, membership etc. Not much is being done to promote the use of other information services such as bibliographies, Referrals, BLDSC, enquiries, in-house video viewing etc.;
Printed materials like books and periodicals continue to be the most-sought after materials in the British Council Libraries in spite of all the competition and hype created by e-resources, online sources and other media like televisions; and

Customers perceive the British Council Libraries as centres wherein quality books and periodicals are made available and they do not wish to see the books and periodicals being replaced by other services.

The literature on British Council Libraries is scarce for the simple reason that viewing and re-viewing of the library operations are treated as an essentially internal matter. There are many in-house magazines being published by the British Council and in many of them, the British Council staff share their experiences and interact with other in the British Council network. Even the British Council News Letter carries occasional studies on the library work of the Council, along with its other developmental activities. Such studies are reported from all over the world. One such study, by Spears describes a survey in the British Council, Portugal. It was the outcome of the need to have a fresh and clear look at the Lisbon Institute and Library when funds were made available to build a new library.

The survey was conducted in March 1977 and it was decided to seek the opinions of not only their 3000 members but also of potential users to try and discover why they did not use the library. 4500 students learning English in the Lisbon Institute were chosen the targets since they formed about 80% of the library users and yet many were not using the library. A statistical sampling method was chosen whereby certain hours of the teaching day and certain days of the week were selected and one class at every ability level was sampled in its entirety at these times.

The findings are as shown below:

Only 46% of the 4500 students used the library and of these 48% took out less than 5 books a year;
ii. The bulk of non-users were in the beginner’s classes or those who had classes early in the morning or late at night;

iii. About 13% claimed that they did not know there was a library or thought it was not available to students;

iv. Demand was higher for new books in the class numbers 100s, 300s, 700s as against the 500s and 600s;

v. Only 51% of users felt they could find books/periodicals easily and quickly in the library facility; and

vi. Most of them (81%) felt that 3 books for 3-week loan facility were sufficient.

Suseela Kumar 66 looks at the British Council libraries from a Council Librarian’s point of view, concentrating more on the collection development in the British Councils in India. Set up as ‘mini British public libraries’ to enable those interested to have access to literature on all aspects of British life and thought, the libraries have moved on from books to ‘computerised information.’ She comes to the conclusion that the Council’s libraries have a large and influential clientele not attached to any institution for which these libraries are the only source of bibliographical information.

‘Infonews,’ a monthly produced by Information Services Management (ISM) of the British Council, has a subtitle, “Informing the library and information network” and is a way of sharing knowledge across the network” 67. Innovative ideas to promote the library and information centre are experimented and the results are usually presented as reports in there journals. As part of Knowledge & Learning Centre project, a range of databases was introduced by the Council and Noble 68 shares her experiences with her colleagues. The British Council and the rest of the world are moving away from paper-based means of recording information. According to her it is not enough that the concept of online library has been introduced. People should know the details of the databases and their contents and
how fantastically useful they are. Marketing the databases, she gives some tips on how to promote online library:

1. Spell out the databases benefits
2. Offer remote access
3. Offer all the databases as a package
4. Promote them to groups of professionals
5. Keep initial prices low
6. Keep password access simple

Knowledge & Learning Centre approach is described as “the offer of the entire British Council tailored to the needs of our defined target groups in an integrated, holistic way”.

Knowles carried out a survey on seventy people, both British Council staff and customers in Cairo, Kuala Lumpur and the UK to identify whether patterns exist in the way in which people prefer to learn. The results have been fascinating and indicate patterns of preference in terms of how people’s past experiences of learning at school, college, university, work and through life experiences in general affect their current approaches to learning and their learner support needs. The research seeks to question the extent to which it is relevant to tailor or adopt learner support product, services and teaching methodologies for British Council staff to meet the specific needs of learners from different cultures. Knowles suggests that methodologies developed in western society can be adopted in other cultures.

Infonews has two such interesting articles by Jenny Gilmour and Elizabeth Townson. The former describes the millennium Britnet Day that was celebrated jointly by the Teaching centre and the Information Centre, by organizing seminars for teachers, demonstration lessons, free testing for young learner and finally an Internet quiz that had 150 participants. Gilmour concludes: “This kind of cooperation between the teaching centre and the information service is invaluable and indeed inevitable. In such and integrated centre as ours it would be unthinkable for something similar to be organized by only one section”. The integration of culture and information work is evident in Townson’s narrative regarding her library’s efforts to increase the profile of the library and information service and to encourage usage by the target groups. A series of events was organized including a
seminar aimed at library and information professionals and another one on knowledge management.

In another feature Fushayi recounts how the Council library in Harare coped with change and managed to attract back its lost members. The article is a case study on how policy changes affect the traditional library services and how, with proper motivation and initiative, a threat/weakness can be converted into strength/opportunity. When the management centre was established in the library, there was a shift in the priority groups, particularly those determined by Department for International Development (DFID). This contrasted with the Council’s original aims and objectives of providing reading and study material to the Zimbabwean population in further and higher educational and the young professionals. The stock had to be weeded and refocused in line with the new priority groups. But this led to a drop in library membership - from 2422 to 343 between 1994 and 1998 but the management centre membership rose from 277 to 521 in the same period. As part of damage control exercise, a team under the ISM co-ordination was formed. “To re-established ourselves as a model in library and information service provision in Zimbabwe. We needed to admit the need for change and commit ourselves to it by deciding need for change and commit ourselves to it by deciding on a course of action to take and time frames to work within”. The planning group came up with three main services to be offered in Harare: the lending library, management centre and information resource centre, each with specific services to be provided to the agreed user groups. The library was re-designed with equal prominence to all the groups and gradually, after the refurbishment and re-stocking of the library took nearly six weeks to be completed, the response was positive. Fushayi sums up: “Use of our services has greatly improved, which shows that it is important to analyze one’s position and be willing to change in order to provide people with the services they need”.

Apart from policy and services, the special focus now is on new developments in electronic resources and how the British Council intends to be at the fore front in offering these new services to its customers. Noble’s article interprets ‘e’ as ‘effective resources’ and spells out the benefits of the databases being introduced as part of the British Council’s Knowledge & Learning Centre project. Stressing the
advantages that databases have over books, Noble gives tips on how to maximize their use.

Firzana Perveen’s article also deals with the same theme: balancing between the virtual and physical library and finds it both exciting and challenging to supplement “our traditional skills with new ones. The aim remains the same - to provide targeted services to our users - but with virtual resources you can reach more people”. The main elements one has to look for in resources are listed in detail, viz., currency, remote access, Site/country license, price, password and IP access, concurrent or named user access and content.

Learner support, a major strand of ISM’s work, brings back the focus on gathering information, identifying opportunities, and building relationships with potential partners. Knowles sees it as Policy, products and services which enhance the learning experience of students/learners who use British Council services”. The focus is on supporting the learning needs of external customers such as students of English, examination students, distance learners and self-motivated independent learners. She links education to information work and clearly defines the need for such a service as:

i. To engage our target audiences by providing enhanced learner support services: young professionals, young learners and agents of change;

ii. To add value to the learning experience of customers through the provision of a range of suitable support services;

iii. To support the general department of young professionals through the provision of access to resources and support and to identify opportunities to introduce information services to “add a wider and deeper cultural relations dimension to a learning experience”. Knowles suggests the working together of all the units - English Language Teaching, Enterprises and education and Target group and also the global network of offices and external partners in the UK; and
iv. To provide support to teacher and tutor networks (by providing access to collections including teacher target materials, by providing user education, to enhance access to information and by targeting teacher networks to provide proactive information about events of interest.

v. To develop services for those engaged professional self-development through further department of tools and resources to under in management resource centres.

British Council repeatedly stresses the importance of learners. Supporting learners is an important aspect of the British Council information services and efforts are always taken to ensure and improve the quality of the customer experience. Initiatives to support learners are encouraged and supported. One such initiative, reported by Costain⁷⁶, describes how the Knowledge & Learning Centre in Cairo spent a lot of time learning about who their target audiences were and what they wanted from the Knowledge & Learning Centre.

The services offered were developments of the physical collections already held in the library before it became a Knowledge & Learning Centre and these were boosted by the addition of high quality technology and virtual content. It was found that the users wanted hardware and software that was immediately available, worked properly and gave fast access to the content they wanted. What the team learned was that:

i. Learners really felt the difference in being able to move easily from long learning programmes to online subscriptions, then to the catalogue without having to log in and out of different systems; and

ii. That members could be incredibly tolerant of teething troubles if they were explained what the problem was and when it might be solved.

Similar to Infonews, there are some in-house journals being published by British Council, India, like India News and Connecting. 'India News', carrying the
strap word, “Believing in people and the power of awareness” was “a staff newsletter with a difference”, published by British Council, Calcutta. Like ‘Information Monitor’ (InfoM) published from Chennai, this newsletter has also ceased publication but was the first attempt at all-India level to lend voice to the British Council staff. The first few issues of India News were library-specific and featured one library per issue. These articles make interesting reading since they throw light on the history and evolution of the British Council Libraries in the Indian network. “It is a long time since the Council opened shop in Agra in 1948. Just the job of researching the growth of the Council in India could be an interesting experience. Also, a big learning experience because no organization can ignore its past, a past from which it has evolved, while it tries to shape its present and its future”.

‘India News’ took readers on a journey to each centre, capturing the distinctive flavour of all the thirteen offices/libraries existing at that time. Shabin Ahmed researched the birth date of the Council in Calcutta and found out that the British Council Library in Calcutta was formally opened in Feb 1950 by Sir John Sargent. A detailed description of the setting up is given and also how, the British Council, by virtue of its organizing a Shakespeare exhibition in Shakespeare’s fourth centenary year (1964) was instrumental in Theatre Road being renamed as Shakespeare Sarani. He concludes by saying that “the British Council has a built-in reservoir of strength, derived from the intrinsic and Universal value of its work which enables it to survive and prosper even in a hostile environment. The ‘sapling’ planted in 1934 has grown into a big ‘banyan tree’ with deep roots in over 100 countries”.

Similarly, in another one on British Council, Pune, Bakshi tells how the British Library in Pune, “the Oxford of the East”, has grown from strength to strength: from 4000 books and 4 staff in 1960 to 420000 books, 18 staff, 12000 members and one Business information centre in 1998. Pieced together, the articles build the history of British Council Libraries in India.

“Connecting”, the British Council newsletter published from Chennai, brings news from South India and suggestively tells of the contemporary brief for Indo-
English cultural relations. It gives the definition of British Council in India. "The British Council is Britain's network for education, science and technology, culture and development services. It provides individuals and Institutions with access to contemporary British ideas and expertise. In India the Council operates as a division of the British High commission. With offices in the four metros and a network of thirteen libraries, this is the Council’s largest operation in the world".

But in 2004, this is changed: "The British Council connects people worldwide with learning opportunities and creative ideas from the UK and builds lasting relationships between UK and other countries".

The change reflects the shift that has taken place in the Council’s priorities. A review of articles in Connecting between 2001 and 2004 reveals that there have been sweeping changes in its library network. The greater processes of international intellectual change do seem to have changed the way cultures relate and also the need to relate. About the IT Learning Resource Centre, Connecting has this to say under the title 'IT @ the British Council'. The British Council is changing, continually introducing new initiatives in response to the information needs of young professionals and students of today. One such initiative is the new IT Learning Resource Centre. In the same issue, Edmund Marsden, Regional Director, British Council, South Asia, writes welcoming the "revitalized" news letter and "even more the new connections we expect it to make". "For fifty four years and in all major cities of India, the British Council has acted as catalyst to the rich and diverse cultural relationship between the peoples of India and the peoples of Britain. During those years our priorities have changed many times and our offer of programmes and services has similarly adjusted to fast - developing external environments. Those changes, bilaterally and multilaterally, have never been so rapid, intense or as exciting as now".

While stressing the need for newsletter such as Connecting as a monthly forum to explore the context and the rationale for these changes/initiatives, Marsden does not forget the library: "And as an organization applauded for our libraries in India, we shall return frequently to the new knowledge opportunities yielded by this information age". But, for organizations like British Council, information work and knowledge sharing also do have a cultural angle to it. For the British Council,
originally established for cultural propaganda way back in 1934, even in knowledge sharing, the work of cultural relations finds itself reoriented by the new information context. Marsden emphasizes the importance of new attitudes of openness and transparency and the building of trust. He believes that time and resources should be devoted to identify communities crucial to the organization’s success: “It is part of the cultural relations remit to be attuned to the distinctive cultural factors differently steering the new habits of co-operations. What, for instance, are the changing needs and expectations of young professional Indians in regard to their working environment today? It is here that modern cultural relations and the knowledge offer of tomorrow must seek convergence”.

This realisation is what has led to the reinventing in the British Council: “We are not rejecting the past. But we are creating a future that will make us relevant to the need of a new generation of professional men and women, people with international outlook and hugely increased expectations, when it comes to services and standards. Above all we want to strike the right balance between providing services face to face (“offline”) and online to the growing number of Internet users in India”. Marsden speaks at length about the proposed changes in the British Council Libraries in India to make them “a social space”, a centre where people can meet, discuss, argue, learn and get to know each other”, for, according to him, “Cultural relations must be based on personal, face to face, contact wherever possible”.

There are many articles in ‘Connecting’ that focus on the changing faces of British Council Libraries in India. Eunice Crook Director British Council, South India lists out various online information services available to the library members, at the same time ensuring that “our book collections continue to offer you the best of British books in key areas”. The inauguration of the much awaited knowledge and learning centre (Knowledge & Learning Centre) in Delhi is heralded as “the first of our new look libraries” and is described as “a pioneering online and offline centre of information access, educational opportunity and professional resource”. “Recognizing how information access creates the mobility and opportunity for enterprising young people today, the British Council in India is pioneering this library of the future.”
The new online products available for library members as a result of this initiative have been these resources, according to Tait, may not show up during a standard Internet search by any of the search engines, “although they are silently ticking away in the background. They are “invisible web” and are very important for professionals and British Council Libraries offer a selection of the best amongst these electronic pay-for-use resources from the UK. Tait goes on to give a detailed description of these resources, their content and relevance.

Marsden’s article highlights the opening of the new library premises in Bangalore and describes the vision for the British Council library network in the coming years. “The new library is not just a change of location but an ideological shift in the notion of a British Library. It provides books, which of course, remain at the heart of any library collection. It also provides access to an increasing range of electronic information resources. And it provides facilities for meeting and video-conferencing, allowing ideas to be exchanged both by face to face meetings and by virtual interactions with key interest groups within India and beyond. The concept is to add value to our existing service by making available quality-assured information resources online and providing an environment for the exchange of ideas”.

The innovative services and products offered by the British Council Libraries unveil a virtual information powerhouse that packs the world’s largest information resource database with a virtual library at one’s fingertips. “A world of knowledge, now on your desktop” presents EBSCO, the world’s largest full text academic and business database designed specifically for managers, business schools, corporate houses, academicians, students and researchers.

However it is gratifying to note that the British Council Libraries have not excluded books. With its network of 11 libraries and some 100,000 members across India, the British Council is clearly dedicated to the joy of reading. Meyer points out that promoting reading is a way of life for the British Council because “reading reaches across borders of class, religion, gender and politics. Moreover, it’s a hugely enjoyable way of engaging people from. The author then goes on to
describe the features of *Encompass*, the Council's new creative reading website. Another feature on the new and improved British Council Library in Chennai throws light on the library's new services and new products. Fully automated library with state-of-the-art infrastructure; services to young learners, DVD collections, exclusive library websites, access to a wide range of premium online resources including remote log-in facility the India library network has come a long way in the last two decades. All this has been in response to the changing needs of the customers on the one hand and exploitation of new technologies on the other. Those who were actively involved in the development of the library network find nothing strange in this since change is a way of life with the British Council.

Reflecting on this, Viswanathan writes: “Yes, I have seen a lot of change. But customer’s needs are still similar. Even in those days there was a mix of people who came simply because they loved books and there were those who had specific information or reference needs. What I see around me is a completely different organization from the one I joined and a completely different external environment from 1966. I am convinced that the Council is changing continually to serve the needs of customers better. And that’s as it should be”.

The same attitude is seen in Rammohan: I am excited to be a part of this change process because I am beginning to see the library evolve from being a place where you came to find a book to a space that is sometimes physical, sometimes virtual, sometimes experiential and at other times reflective, some times fast information need based at other times allowing me to browse through the fiction shelves just enjoying the smell of a new book”.

It is not the introduction of new online products and services that is exciting. It is really the co-existence of both- the on and the offline - that is refreshing. Both Viswanathan and Rammohan illustrate this with anecdotes from their own experience. Taking stock of the development of British Council’s India library network, Jayarajan who was the first Indian to become Head of information services in British Council Libraries, India, has this to say: “During the 50 plus years of their existence in India, the libraries have become an integral part of the educational and socio-cultural structure of the country. It is difficult to find any one
in India, whatever position they hold today, who has not had beneficial contact with the British Council Libraries in India, during student days, preparing for examinations, competing for jobs or keeping themselves updated professionally. On an average, about 10,000 users visit these libraries every day and the figure goes up to 20,000 on Saturdays. They come to borrow books, refer resources, read UK newspapers, get information, use the Internet facility or just drop by! But the libraries ensure that there is always something new for them, something different from what they might have seen during the last visit. He points out the factors behind the popularity of the British Council Libraries: “How have we been able to achieve all this? There are many factors: Our library are totally customer focused, we invest a lot in staff, especially to ensure that they have the right skills and competencies, we have an effective system for monitoring and evaluating our services, our objectives are clearly stated, we work according to an agree plan, we receive effective back-up support from our headquarters in the UK, we expect the highest possible commitment from the top management and finally we encourage our team”.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The phenomenal role the British Council Libraries have played in promoting understanding between the two countries for over fifty years has much to do with their activities in promoting education, especially in higher education, where the private or personal rate of return is highest and where differences in levels of knowledge and skills lead sharply to different levels of anticipated returns to the individual. No sector is more productive of international exchange and the building of long-term relationships than that of contemporary education and professional department. The purpose of this study is to bring out the role played by the British Council Libraries in promoting higher education or, in other words, how the libraries support the learners in achieving their goals. The following chapters, tracing the history of the British Council Libraries worldwide and in India, try to consolidate and assess the ways and means through which the British Council Libraries attract and appeal to their younger partners - from traditional books to the new online Masters courses being offered in the very latest Knowledge and Learning Centre, New Delhi and how the libraries have helped the learners to
realize that access to knowledge and new ways of learning give them control over their own lives and careers to a degree never experienced before.

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