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Comment by Connie Lamb

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Two experts within the university community have written of the practical effects of the current pandemic on life in academe.

Connie Lamb has long been the patron of this journal as well as Editor. It is because of her work that Brigham Young University has made possible the online version of the *Comparative Civilizations Review*. Currently she serves as Librarian – Social Sciences for the university and she is also on the Board of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations.

She comments on the effect Covid-19 has had on libraries in America and worldwide:

The Coronavirus pandemic put a halt to many normal activities. One of the institutions heavily impacted by the virus is libraries.

Public libraries across America and other countries shut their doors earlier this year to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Yet libraries are central to our free society. Libraries are critical elements in the free exchange of information at the heart of a democracy.

“Public libraries are the soul of a civilization” (Gautam Parel). They provide space where people of all ages and income levels can practice lifelong learning. They are also social spaces for community members. Libraries are the most democratic institution because they level the intellectual playing field.

Library closures have reduced the influence of this democratic institution in public life. Libraries have been innovative in creating options and supporting learning as much as possible, especially using technology. One result is the increased demand for e-books and access to online resources. But people without computers rely on library access, so that portends that the knowledge gap will widen. Unique material found in archives, for example, are not accessible for research.

In an article about reducing library staff in Pakistan’s libraries, Abid Hussain makes the comment that “it is an established fact that those who shut the door of libraries will open the door of ignorance.” Thus, remote librarians can do much but not everything to guide patrons to the information they desire.

Libraries have been an essential element in major civilizations for millennia. Knowledgeable and progressive societies need them, and although technology has improved access, it is librarians who lead the way in organizing and making knowledge available as well as providing community service.

Let's hope libraries are not closed much longer.