Chapter 11

Plagiarism: The Role of Librarian and Teachers in Combating It

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ABSTRACT

Plagiarism is using other’s writing without properly crediting the author. The act itself may involve a violation of copyright. It definitely violates academic ethics. In the age of the internet, proliferation of information available online has made it extremely easy to plagiarize. There are various types of plagiarism and academic misconduct, though scholars often disagree as to exactly what constitutes a proper definition of plagiarism. Very often teachers, as well as students, practice it in some form or other due to sheer ignorance. It is the responsibility of the teachers and the librarians to devise strategies to combat plagiarism within the academia by raising awareness within both the teaching and student communities.
INTRODUCTION

All serious students of literature are aware of the fact that no plays by William Shakespeare are “original” in the modern sense of the term. So much so, that there is a separate branch of Shakespearean criticism called “source studies” entirely devoted to finding and tracing the relationship between the “originals” and the end-products. Not only Shakespeare, but the same is true for the fables and myths of ancient cultures which have been worked and reworked by later poets and authors. The basic argument used in such cases is that the originality of these authors and their creations lies not in their subject matter, but their treatment of it. However, with time, the concept of originality has undergone a massive transformation. In the contemporary world, to “borrow” or to “lift” someone else’s ideas would constitute an infringement of copyright and would be categorized as an act of “plagiarism”.

Etymologically, the word has derived from Latin “plagiarius”, meaning “a kidnapper”, in the broadest sense, it implies the unethical appropriation of someone else’s intellectual property. It is both a legal and ethical issue as it often involves infringement of copyright, and always involves infringement of intellectual property rights. The concept of plagiarism is inalienable from the act of writing. It is while writing that people reproduce, intentionally or otherwise, the sentences, syntactical structures, and ideas of other people. Thus, in order to understand the motivation that drives plagiarism in academia, it is important to understand the incentives for writing that are prevalent within it.

Within the academic structure, students write due to compulsion for getting grades while academicians have to write either for their promotion or to create an impact in their field of specialisation. There may be several other motives of writings in other fields, for instance, a politician writes to promote his political agenda, and journalists write according to the motivation of his profession; bloggers write as per the specification of their blog and their predilection, while doctors write on diseases and treatments in order to advance the knowledge in their field. Plagiarism may occur in all these cases as well, but the researchers in this instance will restrict the discussion to the menace of plagiarism exclusively within academia.

We live in a civilised society, and this society sets down certain rules and codes of conduct for all its members. Among several such regulations, one that we all unanimously agree on is that cheating and the act of stealing are immoral and unethical acts. For instance, stealing a tangible object like a laptop is a heinous crime and none of us who wishes to be considered as a civilised person will agree to do it. But it is surprising to see that the people in the higher education sector—both learners and instructors—either in possession of degrees on which civilized society sets high value or in pursuit of such degrees, often engage in the unethical practice of plagiarism.

There are several instances in the not-so distant past when many famous personalities including several influential political persons as well as writers and academicians were caught plagiarising and had to lose their positions as a fallout of the act, and it has also led to the rescindment of the research degrees of scholars found guilty of the act.

The present article will focus on the concept of plagiarism, types of plagiarism, tools available to check plagiarism and the role of teachers and librarians to combat the same. On the one hand, the article will be useful to the readers to understand the concept of plagiarism and may help them to save themselves from the tag of a plagiarist and on the other, it may show a way to the teaching and librarian community how they can play a significant and vital role to fight the evil of plagiarism within academia.
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