

Libraries and Society

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PREFACE

The present work is an attempt to throw light on the role of libraries in society and on related topics. This theme assumed great significance in western countries long back. In India also the feeling that libraries are the most economical and effective medium to provide life long education, adequate information and healthy recreation to one and all has been gathering impetus. As a consequence not only public interest in libraries has increased, but almost all the universities have incorporated a full paper on this subject in B. Lib. & Inf. Sc. course. The dearth of literature by Indian authors on this subject is, however, known to all. It is hoped that the present work will be of use to students and teachers of library and information science, and of interest to academicians and common readers.

There is nothing completely new under the sun. This book also does not claim to contain new ideas : It is concerned with compact presentation of the subject in simple language. The readers may, however find the chapter on Library Profession interesting and thought provoking.

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A

Libraries in Society

A1 LIBRARY OF YESTERDAY

A whole book quotations can be brought out by compiling what has been said and written in praise of libraries. But, at the same time, the library until recently was considered to be a "Store house for the recorded experience of mankind"¹, or a "place set apart to contain books for reading, study, or reference."² The library was thus expected to collect, arrange, and preserve reading material and make these available on demand. A library that performed these four functions was supposed to be functioning satisfactorily.

A2 LIBRARY OF TODAY

The library of any time and at any place would be expected to perform the above stated four basic functions. But in the present situation it is not sufficient for a library to restrict its activities to these four areas alone. The above stated concept of a library is its derivative, traditional, or conservative concept. The library of yesterday opened its door for the world; the library of today not only opened its door more widely, but also

1 *The New Universal Encyclopedia*. Ed. by John Hannerton (London, Educational Books) V 6, p. 5116.

2 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Ed. by C.T. Onions. 3rd Ed. (Calcutta, Standard Literature Company, 1968), V. 1. p. 1136.

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moved out of its fourwalls to reach larger target groups. Libraries of today have decended from conservative function and are expected to do and are doing much more than these and have assumed diverse dimentions. Wallace writes in this connection, "Libraries have operated Railway Station, housed red cross classes, supplied community meeting rooms, sponsored concerts and dramatic productions, operated museums and even planetariums, held art shows, loaned umbrellas on rainy days and furnished high chair for the infant."³ Likewise Kenyon Committee recorded some sixty years ago that a public library should be the "centre of intellectual life of the area it serves".⁴ The library of today is thus an institution of complex nature so far as objectives, operations, management, services, and sources of finance are concerned. "It is concerned with the refreshment of man's spirit by the provision of books for relaxation and pleasure with assistance to the student and with provision of upto date technical, scientific and sociological information".⁵ The changed character and the wide range of functions which a library is performing today have made it the centre for satisfying the formal and non-formal educational and informational needs of society.

A3 LIBRARY FOR BETTER EDUCATION

The society needs libraries for imparting better education, both formal and non-formal. The progress of a country largely depends on the education she provided to its citizen from their childhood to the end of life. The role a library plays in providing non-formal and life long education to one and all is understandable. The library also plays a significant role in academic institutions. Educationists and scholars hold that it is a "better proof of education to know how to use a library than to possess an university degree".⁶ The UGC (UK) maintained in 1921,

3 Wallace, Sarah Leslie : *So you want to be a librarian* (New York, Harper and Row, 1963), p. 95.

4 Kenyon Committee (UK, Board of Education, 1924) *Report on public libraries in England and Wales*, (1927) p. 3.

5 *Unesco Manifesto for public libraries* issued in 1949, revised in 1972.

6 Sir Cyril Norwood, as quoted by Robert Senn, in *Test questions for school library* (London, 1958).

"The character and efficiency of a university may be gauged by its treatment of its central organ, the library... An adequate library is not only the basis of all teaching and study, it is the essential condition of research without which additions can not be made to the sum of human knowledge".⁷ The library has become still more important in academic set up due to change in the nature of education. During the past formal education was based on dictation : the teachers used to dictate and speak and the students used to listen to. This system has been done away with in western countries and in India also we are adopting it with appreciable speed and success. The present-day education is no more an one way system in which the student had passive participation. In the changed system the student is expected to actively participate. The teacher mainly kindles the curiosity of students, makes them aware of basic facts, teaches them methodology and refers them to books to find detailed information for themselves which is discussed later in tutorials etc. Parry Committee wrote in this connection, "lecture and text book method is no longer regarded as the sole method for teaching",⁸ and recommended, "If one of the main purposes of University education is to teach students to work on their own, reading by students must be preferable to attendance at a lecture unless the lecture is superior in presentation or contents to the available literature".⁹ Students are thus referred to books both by teachers and librarians. This leads to active participation of students in educational system. Education of today is becoming more and more library oriented which is evident from the fact that academic libraries of today are always full of students, researchers, and teachers alike. It has rightly been said, "a university is as good as its library".¹⁰ The

7 University Grants Committee (UK), *Report*, 1921.

8 *Committee on Libraries* (University Grants Committee UK) Chairman, Thomas Parry (London, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1967), *Report*, p. 10.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

10 Hutchings, F.G.B. : *Librarianship etc.*, (Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 5.

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library is therefore indispensable for the society for meeting its educational needs.

A4 LIBRARIES FOR ADEQUATE INFORMATION

Human society has travelled a long journey from stone age to the age of technology. The age of technology, in which we are living today, and the technological revolution that we are witnessing today are founded on the pillars of information. Our present society is thus information based society. It would be pertinent to mention here that information is being produced today with such an alarming speed which can only be imagined. There is vast ocean of information in every discipline. The world is deluged with information. The more we learn the more is left to be learnt. Every individual in the society-whether he is a student, researcher, a specialist, a layman, a professional, an industrialist a worker, a child or an aged person-needs information of one kind or the other. The flood of information has therefore to be controlled, analysed, and channelised so as to derive maximum benefit. This means, the available information is to be retrieved and disseminated so that right information reaches the right user. And there can possibly be no better institution than a library for collecting, analysing, storing, and disseminating right information to the needy user on one hand and to find and locate right user for right information on the other hand. Libraries are thus indispensable for the society for meeting its informational needs.

A5 LIBRARY FOR BETTER CITIZEN

As stipulated by Unesco in its *manifesto for public libraries*, right of access to information is the basic right of an individual in a democratic society. Active and informed participation of each and every individual and group in the country's affair is essential for a real democratic set-up. A democratic society needs such citizen as are exposed to the environment around them and are well acquainted with the cultural, social, political, and economic heritage and development of the country. At the same time they should also be capable of analysing and discussing a given situation at a given time so that they could be able to take right decision at right time. Such decisions might

range from ploughing fields to electing people's representatives at various levels. Citizens are therefore to be made knowledgeable both through formal and non formal education on continuing basis. Library is an agency which can serve this purpose most efficiently, effectively, and economically. Highlighting this role of libraries Gaines says "to keep the society from being swamped by ignorance will require the utmost ingenuity and leadership from librarians as well as from educators, sociologists and politicians".¹¹ The role and responsibility of a library to make better citizen is more important and vital than providing facts and figures. Every society has realised this as will be evident from the Kenyon Committee report which put on record "the public interest in libraries has greatly increased and we believe that there is now a far healthier belief in the value of knowledge and in the importance of intellectual life. The public library is no longer regarded as a means of providing casual recreation of an innocent but somewhat important character, it is recognised as an engine of great potentialities for national welfare, and as an essential foundation for the progress in education and culture without which no people can hold its own in the struggle for existence".¹²

A6 CONCLUSION

Libraries are indispensable for society. These educate, inform and convert an individual into a better citizen. There is no gainsaying the fact that the men and women who move and lead the world in any field are informed people and readers. A Library is the most suitable place for such persons. It makes information available in a better and economical manner. The opening of more and more libraries may reduce the number of prisons, police stations and, courts of law. These institutions will always be needed but in a library oriented society their number would certainly be less.

Further reading : Chapter on public libraries

11 Gains, E.J. : *Intellectual freedom*, in *A.L.A. Bulletin*, Feb. 1966. p. 119.

12 Kenyon Committee, *op. cit.*

B

Library Profession

B1 INTRODUCTION

Addressing the students of a library school Christopher Morley gave them a quotation from Erasmus, "Assiduus sis in bibliotheca, quae tibi paradisi locust (may you be assiduous in your library which is for you a place of paradise)".¹ Libraries have been considered a place of paradise, a temple of learning, the heart of an university and so on not only for readers but also for the people who work in these. Working in a library means working with the people of all walks of life who want to read and actually read. A librarian does not only come into contact with lovers of knowledge but also experiences the pleasure and thrill of providing right information to right person at right time. Librarianship thus can be a great profession for those who enter it with seriousness of purpose.

B2 LIBRARIANSHIP FOR WHAT

The noted Sanskrit scholar Mammata has enumerated six purposes for adopting the pursuit of poetry or literature *Kavyam Yashase arthakrite, vyavaharvide, shivettarcchhataye, Kantasammitopadeshyuje sadyahparinivrtitaye*. This means, there are six purposes of writing poetry (i) for name and fame (Yash),

1 As quoted by Wallace, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

money (Arth), learning worldly wisdom and contact with people (Vyavahar), social well-being (Shivettarchhataye), delight of release (Sadyah Parinivritaye), and communicating in soft and acceptable manner. (Kanta sammitopadesh). As a matter of fact, what Mammatt said about the pursuit of poety is true to all pursuits and all professions, particularly service-oriented professions. Library profession can also be chosen for these purposes. Ranganathan has discussed the purpose of choosing librarianship as a profession in detail in his book *Preface to library science*. He has discused in detail as to for what one should choose librarianship as profession. According to him one may do so for (i) personal profit, (ii) social well-being (iii) creative joy including delight of release, and (iv) fulfilment of nation's mission. The points mentioned by Mammatt and later by Ranganathan are in consonance with one another and are of immense importance for the students of library and information science. These have been elaborated below.

B21 Personal Profit

Any one who chooses a profession normally chooses it for earning livelihood and for personal name and fame. Mammatt has placed the purpose of name and fame at the first place and has enumerated the purpose of earning money as secondary purpose. One wants to earn name and fame also for personal profit. In choosing librarianship as his profession a person thinks of personal profit in terms of salary and position (name and fame) as is true in choosing any other pursuit. Ranganathan accepted in 1948 that (then) the librarians were miseraby paid, but had forecasted that librarianship in India will soon become a highly paid profession. His blessings became true in his life time. As a result now librarians are considered to be at par in terms of salary and status with their counterparts in schools, colleges, universities and research institutions. Frequently we come across advertisements in newspapers wanting librarians in lucrative scales of pay. The pedestal of library profession and the status of librarians have also risen considerably. The profession of librarianship is bound to prosper more as far as personal profit is concerned, because the present society has

entered the information age in which more and more librarians and information scientists will be needed.

B22 Social Well-Being

One may choose library profession for making contribution towards social well being of the masses. Librarians can achieve this goal by providing information to various group of readers including administrators, scientists, agriculturists, economists, engineers, and others, and thus can contribute towards the development of the nation. Ranganathan said in this context "I say that independent India cannot long delay realising the urgency for establishing libraries of the right sort manned by daring souls like you...She can not make progress without a public library system. When she realises and she will soon do so that her social betterment can not be achieved without libraries and the service of library science, then will her leaders and people appreciate the farsighted step which the Delhi University has taken...to introduce a degree course of library science".² Ranganathan spoke thus in one of the inaugural addresses delivered in the Department of Library Science, University of Delhi in 1947. In his life-time he saw library profession growing into a fruitful profession. The country and her leaders realised the role which a library can play in social well-being of the nation, and as a result we see numerous libraries of all types which were set up after independence.

B23 Creative Joy and Delight of Release

The profession of librarianship fills the professional with creative joy. Earning fame and personal profit also bring joy in ones life. This joy and happiness can be obtained through all the professions, but joy and happiness derived out of personal gains or profit are short lived. In addition to this joy a librarian drives personal pleasure and happiness also by serving a reader, by providing information to the needy, and thus by working for social well-being of the nation. Joy received out of such acts is everlasting and can be derived only in selected professions. Librarianship in one of such professions which brings to the professional everlasting happiness.

² Ranganthan, Preface, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

B24 Fulfilment of Nations Mission

The fourth purpose of the pursuit of librarianship, according to Ranganathan, is fulfilment of nation's mission. Librarians have the potentials and capabilities to provide to the nation information needed by her for fulfilling her mission. "Whether a nation is destined to fulfil its mission by lifting library science to a higher potential or not and whatever be the field of knowledge towards which its mission gets gravitated, its fulfilment will have to depend on a long chain of events, personalities and institutions, one inevitable link of which should be its library system".³

B3 LIBRARIANSHIP FOR WHOM

B31 Difficult and different profession

Special type of manpower is needed for managing and organising a library. This is so because the profession of librarianship has distinct features. First of all, it is to be borne in mind that *Librarianship is a difficult profession*. To prove oneself worthy of the profession of librarianship is much more difficult than to prove worthy of any other profession. For example, when one is appointed as a teacher in a particular department he has to prove his worth and ability to the teachers and students of his particular department alone. Students and teachers of other departments are not going to judge, appreciate, or criticise him. But when he becomes a librarian, say in an academic institution, all the teachers, students and administrators observe and judge him from their own different angles. And the librarian is supposed to come up to the expectations of all, proving himself competent on their standard. Ofcourse this job is not an easy job but, then only by dint of his professional performances the librarian can make the library the heart of his institution and he would become the most appreciated person on the campus. The second thing that an aspirant for the profession should bear in mind that this profession is *different than other professions* in a peculiar way. In most other professions if the client is dissatisfied he would

³ Ranganathan : Preface., *op. cit.*, p. 24.

come to the professional time and again, but will cease coming to him if satisfied. For example, if a student is not satisfied (i.e., if he did not understand a particular lesson) he would go to the teacher for learning again; if a patient is not cured he would come again and again to the doctor but would cease when cured. Similarly, if the accounts people do not pass the bill or keep it pending, the claimant would approach them, but after receiving the money he would not. On the contrary, when it comes to libraries, a satisfied reader would keep on consulting the library, but if dissatisfied he would stop his visits.

B32 Qualities of a librarian

Discussing the qualities which a good librarian should possess Wallace writes "...it goes without saying that there is not a single desirable personality trait which would not be desirable in a librarian".⁴ Thus any good quality adds to the performance of a librarian and there is no end to such qualities. The following qualities must however be present in a librarian :

1. Organising Capacity
2. Love for books and readers
3. Service Minded
4. Soft spoken and tactful
5. Presence of mind and sense of humour.

B321 *Organising Capacity*

A librarian should be capable of organising men and material in his library in such a way as may be necessary for deriving maximum benefit for readers. To achieve this, a student of library and information science must be serious in studies so that he learns various techniques of organising knowledge in libraries. In libraries reading materials should be organised keeping in view the readers. A faulty classificatory arrangement and faulty cataloguing of books restrict the optimum use of a library. Secondly, right type of men (library staff) should be assigned a particular duty considering their skill and temperament

⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 29.