



Librarianship as a Profession

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1. Introduction

When most of the users of libraries are asked, 'What does the job of a librarian involve?' The probable answer would be finding or issuing library books or locating information on request. This is because many people's experiences of librarians is of the frontline user service staff. Have you ever considered how the books get on to the shelves and are ready for you to borrow? Behind the scenes there are teams of library professionals working to make this happen.

There are library professionals for each and every activity of any library. They select the books for purchase, process the orders, create bibliographic records and then physically prepare them for placing on the shelves. This makes it possible for you to find the books in the library catalogue. In this lesson, we will appraise you with different aspects related to library profession. After studying this lesson, you will be able to understand the scope of library profession and decide upon librarianship as a career.

2 Objectives

1. Explain the role of librarianship as a profession;
2. Enumerate the qualifications and qualities of library professionals;
3. Discuss the role of library professionals in disseminating information;
4. Illustrate various courses offered in the field of library and information science;

3. Librarianship - a profession

A profession is a body of practitioners, who undertake and undergo specialized training and studies to practice their skills in the service of the society.

Like any other profession, such as law, medicine or teaching, librarianship is a profession requiring special training. Librarianship is an old and honoured profession. In recent years there have appeared notable increases/changes in the collections and services of libraries. The expansion in the responsibilities of librarians has brought with it a pressing need of special preparation for their work.

Librarianship is a people' profession. A librarian's job is to connect people with the information they are seeking in whatever format it is available. All library related jobs have one central purpose, i.e., to help people access and use information. It can be for education, work, or for pleasure. In all library roles, user services and communication skills are important. Libraries of all kinds are keen to demonstrate their value to as wide an audience as possible.

Librarians select materials, organize those materials, and help people to use them effectively. Many librarians are seen by users working on library counter. But a great majority of them work behind the scenes in technical support and acquisitions in administration. Although librarians traditionally worked with printed resources, they have kept up with ever-evolving technology. Now they work with electronic resources that include the Internet, computerized database sand e-books. Present day librarians are also referred to as information professionals.

One must develop several skills while training to be a librarian. But he or she should have certain qualities that will contribute to his or her success in this occupation. A librarian must be an active learner in order to adapt to the rapid changes in technology and the dissemination of information that are inherent to this field. He or she must have strong communication skills and the ability to work independently and as part of a team. A librarian must be good at problem solving and have strong comprehension skills.

The library profession is bound to flourish in near future in India as still libraries have not the whole population of our nation. It has been estimated by the National *Knowledge Commission of India* that the country should have at least 1500 universities to fulfil the need of higher education. Apart from this, because of *Right to Education Act*, thousands of schools are to be started. All these will also must be supported by libraries.

3.1 Employment and Designation

Most librarians work in school and academic libraries. Others work in special, business, scientific/research or in libraries of other organizations. Employment opportunities for library professionals are thus available in all sectors of government and industries. With experience, librarians can advance to administrative positions, such as department head, library director or chief information officer. As mentioned earlier, earning a doctorate degree can contribute to one's upward movement in the library science field.

3.1.1 Academic Library Sector

Academic library sectors include university, college, and school libraries. The university library system has designations of Librarian, Deputy Librarian and Assistant Librarian at senior level. At middle level, the designations are Senior Professional, Professional and Semi Professional, etc. At supporting staff level, designations are Library Assistant, Library Attendant, including multi-tasking staff, etc. The college libraries have the designation of Librarian which is equivalent to the Assistant Librarian of university libraries and the middle and supporting levels are same as the university libraries. The school's libraries usually have a librarian belonging to middle level of management and two or more support staff depending upon the size of the library.

3.1.2 Public Library Sector

The public library system is getting momentum in India. Initially, the public library was serving to the urban people, but now it is extending to rural areas. Hence, in coming years, there will be several rural libraries at village level. Public Libraries in India. The State Central Libraries, District Libraries and Sub Divisional/Town Libraries and Rural/Village Libraries have four categories of staff, namely, managerial, professional, support staff and administrative staff. The last tier, the Rural Knowledge Centres/Community Information Centres have only the professional level staff and support staff depending upon their size.

3.1.3 Special Library Sector

This sector has the designations like Librarian, Library and Information Officer, Scientists, Manager Library, Manager-Knowledge Management. These posts are equivalent to the officer grade-A or above in the administrative pattern of staffing. In scientific organizations like CSIR, DRDO, ISRO, etc. these posts are equivalent to different levels of scientists. The private and corporate sectors are paying as per the policy of the organization. Some of the corporate houses are paying wages more than that of the government organizations.

3.1.4 Corporate Sector

In the Corporate sector, large organisations maintain libraries/information centers for their informational needs. These companies employ qualified professionals as Librarians, Information

Scientists, Information managers, Database managers, Resource managers, Knowledge worker, Library supervisor, etc.

4. Qualifications & qualities of library professionals

As you have learnt above, library jobs are different in nature from other general jobs we perform in our day-to-day life. Library is a social institution and librarianship is a part of service industry. It has the responsibilities to support education, research and development, self studies, etc. and become instrument in creating as well as preserving knowledge of our society. Hence the nature of this profession is completely unique. For opting librarianship as a career, a certain amount of training plus qualities in a library worker are required. Several training programmes in LIS are being run by academic institutions and Library Associations. Besides, possessing academic and professional qualifications, a library professional is required to possess qualities of a good worker.

For starting career at higher level, one should possess at least a masters' degree in Library and Information Science with good academic record. Additional qualifications and skills in information and communications technology or specializations in patent information system, knowledge management, or preservation and conservation, archival studies, etc. may give an added advantage in employment. For middle and lower level, a bachelors' degree, diploma, certificate, etc. in Library and Information Science with good academic record may give good job opportunities.

To know about the qualities of library professional, let us think about a 'role model character' for librarians. Libraries are service institutions to serve the community of users. A library and information science professional should possess following qualities:

- a) One whose existence is recognized by the readers/ users.
- b) Someone who is accessible and give response all the time, whether faceto-face or on telephone or correspondence or via email.
- c) One who can give results in accordance with what is required by the users. It implies the entire range of personal and technical competence of the librarian, viz. search skills, knowledge of resources, facilitation, cataloguing, managing budgets, managing staff, etc., whatever the tasks assigned.
- d) A good librarian is passionate about the job. There can never be good/ excellent service without passion in what we do.
- e) Should have teamwork skills and good interpersonal skills.
- f) A librarian should be familiar with current and emerging technologies.
- g) One who has the urge to gain knowledge all the time, as everyone wants latest information.
- h) Lastly, a good librarian is one who understands and applies Ranganathan's Five Laws of Library Science.

5. Role of library professionals in dissemination of information

You know that universe of knowledge, and its sources, is vast and ever expanding. On the other hand, the world of information seekers undergoes many changes. It is for the library professionals to organize, control, and manage the stored information, in such a manner that it is made available to its right user at the right time. Libraries provide a variety of quality services in order to improve the communication, use and creation of knowledge. In today's information age, increasing importance is placed on information dissemination. Librarians have an important role to play in the generation, preservation, and dissemination of this information. This is carried out by acquiring sources of information, processing, storing, retrieving these sources and providing library services.

The way knowledge is created, disseminated and acted upon continues to go through rapid change and evolution. The role of libraries and librarians in this new knowledge economy is very important. Librarians know how knowledge is created in today's information environment. What, when and how

it should be delivered to appropriate users is decided by the librarians. It involves a series of activities or operations starting from developing an understanding of users' needs to selecting appropriate information sources for retrieval of desired information. In the web world, too the librarians play a vital role in the dissemination of knowledge. This is so because, the role of the library professionals is to mediate between the user and the information resources.

User's requirements is another area which is to be considered in this connection. The role of librarian thus is all about series of operations and decisions starting from developing an understanding of user's needs to selecting appropriate resources for retrieval.

6. Education and training programmes

The libraries and their activities are highly sensitive and specialized in nature. So much so that over a period in the past century, their contents have become a special subject, namely, Library and Information Science (LIS) for study, learning and research. Although a variety of institutions are offering courses related to library and information science education, these can be broadly placed under various categories, i.e., Certificate, Diploma, Degree, Masters' Degree, M. Phil and Ph. D. These programmes are offered by a variety of institutions that include: universities, polytechnics, open schools, library associations, etc. In India, LIS is being taught at various levels, as mentioned below.

- Senior Secondary Level
- Certificate Programme in Library Science
- Diploma Programme in Library Science
- Bachelor in Library and Information Science (B.L.I.S.)
- Master in Library and Information Science (M.L.I.S.)
- M.Phil. in Library and Information Science
- Ph. D. in Library and Information Science

7. Adaptation of modern technologies

Advances in technology create impact in every walks of life. Library activities are no exception. Print technology (print media) helped in developing a clearer concept of library. Print media made the knowledge/information available to masses. Riding on it, the libraries also could reach masses. With the advent and adaptation of computer, communication and information technologies in the late twentieth century, the libraries (their collections and services) became global. A variety of library software have been developed to help libraries in their working. On-line services are taking place of traditional services in libraries. Collections of e-resources are replacing the traditional forms of collection. Library networks, help from search engines, digitization of old valuable records and such other technologies have become the significant features of modern libraries. The impact of new technologies is thus felt by libraries in every aspect of their activities.

8. Career & job opportunities

For professionally trained and qualified library professionals, librarianship promises a promising career. Starting from some low position in a library one may get the opportunity to avail a senior position in a big library system, a university library, special library, national library, and libraries of United Nations, WHO, ILO etc. Jobs are available as supporting staff, semi-professionals and professionals. The Chief Executives in big library system enjoy the status and pay perks equivalent to Directors, Senior Managers, Senior Scientists, etc. Qualified professionals are offered jobs in book trade, information industry, media, bodies of advocates and doctors. These days, library professionals are also working independently and are referred to as 'library/information consultants'. Library consultant is an individual who can provide the expertise, inspiration, training, and support needed in all aspects of library activities and development. These professionals may put their professional skills to private practice. They assist in solving various library problems of finance, space management, adaptation of technology, etc. for a fee.

8.1 Employment Opportunities

There is a lot of scope for a career in library science. The students after acquiring library science qualifications can find employment opportunities in the libraries of following areas:

1. Public/Government libraries
2. Universities/Colleges schools and other academic institutions
3. News agencies and organisations
4. Private organisations and special libraries
5. Foreign embassies
6. Photo/film/radio/television libraries
7. Information centres/documentation centres
8. Companies and organisations including IT sector with large information handling requirements
9. Museums and galleries, which have reading rooms and research facilities.

8.2 Salaries in Library and Information Profession

The salaries vary depending upon the nature of the organization. Many colleges and universities have adopted UGC scales of salary for the library staff. The library staff in the large establishments of the Central Government enjoy salary mobility based on assessment of performance at intervals, make the job attractive. Persons possessing good academic record and adequate skills in computer and information technology, can look forward to a rewarding career in this profession.

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