

Guest Editorial

Development and Changing Paradigm of LIS Education

Libraries are one of the oldest human institutions. Librarianship too has been in practice for a long time and across cultures, this practice being an expression of the social practices of these cultures. The development of librarianship was closely associated with the recording of messages and information on manuscripts or papers and consequently with the collection of records in individual or public interest. Majority of the activities associated with contemporary librarianship were a part of day-to-day work culture. Later on however, with the popularisation of information sources and the rapid growth of their collection, librarianship came to be recognised as an independent profession. Subsequently, the need for professional training was identified for providing best support to its user community. And over time, specialised issues and settings have translated into academic programmes of professional schools in the higher education system.

Various formal and sincere efforts led to the first library school being founded at Columbia College, USA in 1887. China introduced Library Science education in 1920s. In Thailand, Chulalongkorn University was the first to start an undergraduate program under the auspices of the American Library Association in 1951. In Taiwan, Taiwan Normal University started a training program for librarians in 1955. In Korea, Library Science Education was started in 1957 in Yonsei University. Over the course of the twentieth century, programmes on Library and Information Science (LIS) were launched in a number of countries as and when the need arose.

In India, the first librarian of Imperial library, Calcutta (presently the National Library) initiated a training program for practising library professionals in 1901. In 1911, Sayaji Rao Gaikwad, the erstwhile ruler of Baroda state, invited the American librarian William Allenson Borden (1853-1931), who was a disciple of Melvil Dewey, to create a cadre of library professionals for the newly established libraries in the Baroda state. Resultantly, Mr. Borden established the first formal training school in India in 1912. In undivided India, the Punjab University of Lahore (now in Pakistan) called another librarian, Asa Don Dickinson, from USA. Dickinson started the second educational course in library science, of three months duration, in the year 1915.

LIS is presently a popular course of study, and is one of the most popular courses in a number of countries. This subject has gained tremendous popularity as it is directly related to educational, research and developmental issues of society. It is true that a society is considered to be developed if it has achieved quality results in research activities in various areas of knowledge. At the same time, it is equally true that without information or library support we can never think about quality research.

If we try to understand the life cycle of a subject of study, a subject develops with the growing demand of the user community and changing spectrum of expectations of society from its professionals. LIS as a subject or discipline has recorded a remarkable growth from its inception till now on the same lines. While observing the growth pattern of LIS in various countries, the LIS education system in the United States reflects a continuous and appreciative growth trend in all possible areas of the subject. In India, Library and Information Science as a subject has received proper importance since the time Dr. S. R. Ranganathan came into the field. After Dr. Ranganathan, it is clearly felt that we could not cope up with market expectations in a uniform manner in terms of quality. This is reflected in the mushroom growth of LIS programs, lack of accreditation system, the vast difference between market requirements and course content, lack of expected revisions in course curriculum, the preponderance of generalized courses rather specializations, and lack of adequate emphasis on ICT components in all types of LIS course content. All these factors have created hurdles in developing efficient LIS professionals who can cater to extant demands.

It is true that the quality of research in a subject depends on the quality of the academic programs in that area of knowledge, and vice-versa. Thus, the academic and research activities of a subject are very much dependent on each other in terms of innovation and development. On this particular pattern, we can identify the level of LIS research in different countries.

Recent trends of holding good conferences and seminars like ICDL, NACLIN, ICAL, etc. have provided a good forum for discussing matters relating to the development of the profession. But after observing the huge count of working professionals, their knowledge status, the rate at which technological advancements are occurring, and the prevailing traditional administrative set up, it is probably the right time to focus concertedly on programs like workshops, training courses etc. In these contexts, NISSAT has done good job in the past, and presently, INFLIBNET is

following the same. At this juncture, the role of UGC Human Resource Development Centers is worth mentioning here as they are seriously engaged in training or updating LIS professionals/officers and faculty members continuously.

We cannot ignore the role of professional associations in the growth and development of any field of study. Professional associations not only play key role in developing standards for a subject, but also work as pressure groups for ensuring their successful implementation through local/national governments.

Finally, it must be kept in mind that even though it has a century old past, Library and Information Science is a relatively new discipline as compared to many the other traditional areas of study. For ensuring its continuous growth and development, it is essential for the government, associations, academic bodies and individuals to play an active role in this era of transition. We can observe good count of successful models of LIS education in a number of countries, which can play a catalytic role for ensuring quality development of the subject in other countries. It is the right time to understand and accept the realistic situation of user expectations, market requirements with various types of advancements, and welcome them by implementing them in the form of new, improved or enhanced LIS program.

The papers in this issue address the concerns of LIS education and the recent developments that have been occasioned by the information revolution from diverse perspectives across the globe.

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